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ECOLOGY AND DEATH IN MATEEL: THE MEANING OF HOKA HEY

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ABSTRACT

The counter-cultural community of Mateel in Humboldt County, California, has, in its two decades of existence, developed a unique cultural system based upon a worldview which is the opposite of the technological, scientific American worldview. Rather than alienation from Nature, including the natural processes of life and death, Mateelians realistically include humans into their view of Nature. Their funeral practices and drama reflect this worldview, one which is seen to reduce those social trends which negatively affect the natural environment. The comparison is based upon 15 years of participant-observation in the Mateel community.

Five years ago, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, (24 November 1981) reported that a high school student had raped, brutally beaten, and killed his 14-year-old girl friend, left the body in the woods, and then led his peers to the spot to prove his claim to the deed. For one week, American high school students made this secret trek, until the body was finally reported by one of them to the police. When asked why they went, many stated only that they had never seen a dead body and that they were curious.

In 1972, I asked a visiting 18-year-old New York model to fetch some carrots from my Northern California vegetable garden. One hour later, I found her in a state of wonderment, unable to distinguish the carrots from the peas, but seeing their beauty for the first time. I realized, with awe, that I was looking at an adult who had never pulled a carrot out of the ground.

These are not random events. There is a clear connection between the ignorance of the first example and the ignorance of the second. It is the alienation of Americans from nature, including the primary processes of death and growth. Having lost touch with both, they have no guidelines for dealing with either. Each is left to the experts and the average American expects only to consume.

The purpose of this paper is to examine this alienation from nature as it is manifested through attitudes toward death in two separate but closely related cultural systems. The feedbacks between death attitudes and environmental practices will be considered in each system and the systems will then be contrasted with a view toward isolating the variables which determine the differences. I am not so much attempting to prove anything new as I am attempting to map connections between "purely" ideological,

technological, and environmental aspects of culture. The relationship between technology and the environment, having been long established in anthropology will not be detailed, and I will focus primarily upon the relationship between ideology, i.e. worldview, religion, philosophy, etc., and technology.

It is an accepted assumption in the social sciences that cultures may be viewed as systems and that, therefore, various parts interact causally with various other parts. With regard to death in particular, sociologists who have studied the subject accept the notion that social processes are reflected in changes in death attitudes and practices:

Whatever patterns of culture are developed, the group and the individuals in it will attempt to harmonize the death phenomenon and death related behavior with other factors. Patterns of belief about death will be developed which tend to harmonize with the configurations of beliefs related to other aspects of society [Vernon 1970:9].

The view that cultures are homeostatic systems, in which numerous positive and negative feedbacks create circular, rather than linear causality, is less accepted. However, that is the assumption of this paper. Contrasting and changing death attitudes and practices are seen as the direct and indirect result of massive differences and changes in the use of the environment. These differences relate to differences and changes in technology. Changes in death attitudes are seen as reinforcing the changes in technology and use of the environment which brought them about.

The cultural systems in question are that of mainstream America, meaning the system in which the vast majority of Americans participate regardless of ethnic or class membership, and that of Mateel, a counter-cultural community in northern California. An immediate objection to this comparison could be made that the "counter-culture," as defined by the inventor of the term, Theodore Roszak (1969) is merely a reflection of American culture and that its members, having been enculturated in America, are not participating in a culture of their own, but are merely acting out the opposite of those aspects of American culture with which they disagree. It is, in other words, a reflection of American culture in opposites.

This objection may be met in several ways, each requiring a major discussion of its own. Briefly, Roszak's description of the counter-culture, as well as Charles Reich's (1971) "Con. III," while for the most part accurate at the time, are now obsolete. These are cultural phenomena in rapid flux. The individuals described by Roszak and Reich have by now either made their peace with America, disappeared from public scrutiny into communities such as Mateel, or--unable to make either adjustment--have joined rigidly structured extremist groups of one kind or another. Those who chose the second alternative have by now been engaged in social experimentation for 10 to 15 years. Given factors to be described, they have had sufficient time to generate a cultural entity which qualifies as its own cultural system.

Secondly, in the modern world, old conceptions of culture have become inapplicable in most cases and are best replaced by more relativistic conceptions which allow for the use of the idea of culture in the absence of clear diagnostic features such as language, territory, religion, etc. For purposes of this paper, I am using a model of culture which incorporates Gregory Bateson's (1979) idea of certain kinds of systems as "minds," which "think" through a process which combines the generation of random elements with some selective mechanism. Cultures are either in a state of dynamic equilibrium or change, rapid or slow, because of the interaction of individuals exchanging and selecting ideas at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, institutional, and cultural levels. At each one of these levels, new ideas (the random element), old ideas (culture, the structuring element), and possibly genetic factors, such as the sex of the individual, interact determining the direction of the cultural system as a whole. Whether or not either the American cultural system or the Mateelian cultural system qualify as cultures in the traditional sense, both qualify as cultural systems and as minds engaging in mental process. The operation of these two mental, cultural systems may be compared whether the individuals comprising them at any given moment can be in every case assigned to one group or the other.

A third point relates to subjective experience. Whereas a simplistic view of Mateel might attempt comparison with Anthony Wallace's (1958) revitalization movements, or utopian movements of the nineteenth century, or cults such as that of Jonestown, Guyana, in the twentieth, there are two crucial differences. Firstly, Mateelians share a subjective experience which may be referred to as "transcending culture." The single most common experience to be found among the original Mateelians, next to and often related to, the experience of "dropping out," is the experience they sometimes call "transcendence," brought about either from the use of psychotropic drugs or from meditation, in a few cases, or from a combination of these, or from close association with persons engaging in these activities. While the use of hallucinogens is not now especially widespread, almost all Mateelians have at one time or another used LSD, DMT, psilocybin mushrooms, mescaline, peyote, or Jimson weed or have ingested marijuana, an experience which, for some, closely approximates hallucinogen ingestion. The experience of transcendence, which may be described as the perception of the environment without the operation of the cultural "lens," reveals to one the extent to which normal consciousness is predicated upon enculturation. It therefore provides one with some conception against which to measure the degree to which individual choices are culturebound. It is the shared memory and the idealization of this experience of "culturelessness" which gives Mateelians an edge in escaping the assumptions of American culture in order to generate their own.

A second difference between Mateel and movements of other kinds is what I like to call the "we-are-not-here" syndrome. The first Mateelians were in a very real sense refugees, even fugitives, from the preceding decade of political and social unrest. Whether or not a real threat to them existed, there was clearly a perceived threat. Many also were refugees from the collapse of the Haight-Asbury experiment in San Francisco, which was brought about specifically by too much media attention. Meeting vociferous and frightening resistance to their presence on the part of the local populace, the attitude of the Mateelians was not "united we stand" but "divided we

won't be noticed." It has only been in the past few years that this initial low profile attitude has diminished in favor of a growing sense of cooperation among Mateelians and between them and the preceding residents of the area. The effect of the "we-are-not-here" syndrome was to prevent or place a pressure against any sort of collective planning. Organizations which presently exist were created in spite of this tremendous collective desire to retain the fiction that Mateelians were no different from local Americans. A basic distrust of leadership and a pretense of anarchism greatly enhances this anti-planning tendency. The net result of the interaction of the "cultureless" experience and the "we-are-not-here" syndrome has been the creation of the culture from the level of one-to-one rather than from the level of established structures or leaders. Thus, the culture of Mateel has grown organically through the interaction of people who share the experience, memory, and ideal of transcending their own culture, but who had neither a plan nor a leader. One might go so far as to say that they generated the culture in spite of themselves.

So I justify studying the Mateel culture as a system largely separate from American culture on the grounds that: a) Mateelians have gone beyond both their "mother" culture and the "counter-culture" to the actual generation of a cultural system which is neither; b) the idea of an isolated, homogeneous, clearly bounded culture is somewhat obsolete anyway; and c) Mateelians are unlike other movements because of the shared experience of transcending culture while resisting imposed structures.

Death in America

The Literature

There is no lack of literature upon which to base a construct of the American attitude towards death. In recent years there has been, one might say, an explosion of works dealing with death in America. Spurred by technological innovations which call into question the definition of a formerly all-too-definite state and by a plethora of painful situations in which traditional expectations about death were inadequate for all concerned (Colen 1976), sociologists, legal experts, medical experts, and psychologists have wrangled back and forth over questions of euthanasia active and passive, death with dignity, organ transplanting, etc. While these questions are all highly relevant to the general question of the relationship between technology and ideology and the ecological ramifications thereof, I will confine my discussion to those aspects of the question which lend themselves to cross-cultural comparison between the two specific groups with which I am dealing.

Since an exhaustive literature exists on the historical development of death attitudes in America, I need not elaborate that subject here beyond a few statements. The factors which have led to the current American way of dealing with death are the same factors which have led to the environmental crises of industrial civilization and are the very factors from which Mateelians dropped out: urbanization, secularization, professionalism, alienation, and rationalism to mention a few. I shall approach these first from the perspective of their effect upon death practices, then from the perspective of the effect of death practices upon them.

Talcott Parsons (1963) and Robert Blauner (1966:379) both emphasize technology-related changes in the structure of the American population as prime factors in modern attitudes toward death. Because of the drop in infant and child mortality, most Americans do not see death very often. "Mortality in modern society rarely interrupts the business of life" (Blauner 1966:379). In addition, as a result of the increase in reliance on the medical profession, which is a function of the increase in rationality or scientific worldview, dying is done in the hospital rather than the home. Of the increase in the older segment of the population, Blauner (1966:381) says, "One of the consequences of the devaluation of the old in modern society is the minimization of the disruption and shock death ordinarily brings about." Increase in absolute numbers, according to Blauner, means a decrease in the value of individual life. Blauner sees the decrease in value of the individual as also related to the fragmentation of lives through the multiplicity of roles. People perceive each other less as whole people and more in terms of the role a person plays *vis a vis* themselves. Therefore when an individual dies it is not the loss of a person one has known in many different ways over time, but the loss of the postmaster, the waitress at the diner, Johnny's schoolteacher. Death does not then *impact* on people in modern societies the way it previously did.

A second factor is the rise of consumerism in general and consumerism of funerals in particular. The cost of the complete typical American funeral includes the following elements (*Consumer Reports* 1977:32):

removal of the body to funeral home facilities
 coffin
 embalming and restoration
 use of hearse
 dressing of remains
 various staff services
 arranging for religious services, burial permit, death benefits, and newspaper notices
 providing pallbearers
 arranging and care of flowers
 guest register and acknowledgement cards

Extras include:

vault	flowers
limousine	burial clothing
music	taxes
clergy's fee	plot
digging and closing of the grave	

Many of the costs are hidden in the cost of the coffin. "The funeral is purchased as a unit for one lump sum . . . based on the wholesale cost of the coffin" (*Consumer Reports* 1977:33). Undertakers expect and assume that they will be in charge of all these elements, and proceed with these services and the cost thereof unless they are prevented from doing so by the bereaved (Bowman 1959:30). Thus an assumption of passivity on the part of the bereaved is made on both sides. Yet the most expensive elements in the funeral, embalming, coffin, and vault are not based upon any legal or health necessity (*Consumer Reports* 1977:100).

The funeral is, then a consumer item, with the cost greatly magnified by the interests of the entrepreneur. The undertakers justify themselves these days with the argument that costly funerals and viewing of the body provide "grief therapy," twisting a concept borrowed from the work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969). Yet psychologists are in disagreement about the efficacy of this strategy (*Consumer Reports* 1977:105) and the suggestion is made that in fact the real psychological process involved in funeral purchasing is guilt, a universal feeling amongst bereaved persons who have not made an effort to prevent it (*Consumer Reports* 1977:80). According to Blauner (1966:389), it is just because the funeral is compartmentalized and handled by experts that the "grief therapy" often does not work:

There are many who never fully recover and 'get back to normal' in contrast to the . . . capacity of the bereaved in primitive societies to smile, laugh, and go about their ordinary pursuits the moment the official mourning period is ended.

There are historical reasons why the undertaker has taken over for the family again, relating to the sociological changes brought about by industrial technology. Urbanization means that cemeteries are located far away from the places where people are most likely to die (Aries 1975:151). Urban housing is so much smaller because of limited urban space that coffins can no longer get around the corner. Increase in emphasis on technology means that people die in hospitals rather than at home. On a more abstract level, however, one can say that these modern changes have increasingly deprived people of the self-reliant set of mind. Everything is left to the expert and the more that is left to the expert, the more expert the experts become. The result is a kind of passivity and an expectation that all that will be required in any situation is that one choose among consumer items. One may choose the color, shape, size, and price of millions of items or which kind of passive entertainment to sit and receive, but one will not be asked to choose how or whether or to question why.

Much of the literature on death in America is concerned with the changes in the dying process. The well-known case of Karen Quinlan, whose parents had to bring suit to disconnect her comatose and "brain-dead" body from a respirator, is only one extreme example of an increasingly common problem (Vaux 1970; Colen 1976; Veatch 1976; Benton 1978). The more general problem is the increasing emphasis on the technological in medicine, which is historically the result of the emphasis on rationality in the last hundred years of western civilization (Aries 1975:150). A series of nightmare scenarios based upon extrapolations from the currently feasible in medical technology, from head transplants to organ farms full of comatose people, may be found in Vance Packard's (1977) *The People Shapers*. It is not only the technological aspects, but the sociological and psychological which are of concern--the great depersonalization of dying:

The relatives of the dead are forced by the scientific worldview, rationality, to feign indifference. Society demands from them a self-control corresponding to the propriety or dignity that it imposes upon the dying. The essential thing both for the dying [person] and the survivors is to not let any emotion show through. Society as a whole behaves in the same manner as the hospital staff [Aries 1975:151].

This aspect, the separation of the dying into hospitals, increases the ambivalence of American funerals in that the body is in the hospital rather than the home. Europeans proceed with the funeral quickly, to get the body out of the house. Americans have no such motivation. It is the hospital staff who are anxious to get rid of the body since it represents their failure and is thought to demoralize patients and staff alike. Yet the relatives are reluctant to curtail their need for ritual and solemnity. The undertaker resolves the whole problem by providing a neutral spot where some time maybe allowed for ritual and respect (Aries 1975:154).

Funerals in America, as in any culture (Bowman 1959:24), provide an opportunity for the display of status. Particularly in America, however, status is displayed through consumerism and, clearly, entrepreneurs take advantage of this opportunity to make a profit, as Mitford (1963:48) suggests. The reverse relationship, however, is a bit less obvious and requires more subtle analysis. Consumerism affects death practices, but can it be shown that death practices and the attitudes behind them affect consumerism? It is this side of the relationship which is most relevant to an understanding of the basic difference between American and Mateelian attitudes toward the environment and in order to make this difference more clear, one must enter the areas of psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, and theology or what anthropologists refer to collectively as "ideology." The Episcopal priest John B. Snow (1970:50-51) traces this connection in a literary but revealing manner in an article for an ecological symposium sponsored by the National Council of Churches and the Department of Higher Education of the State of New York. He states that the issue is basically one of greed and describes a hypothetical American plumber:

But here it was coming on again. Everything could change. You could lose everything. Everything could disappear in a second, like a great black curtain coming down on the whole earth. When you die everything else dies, too. And then there is nothing. He reaches for his beer and sees that his hand is shaking . . . he sees out in the bay an aqua plane, moving across the water at incredible speed, sixty or seventy knots, its twin outboards screaming. . . . Suddenly he wants that boat more than he ever wanted anything in his life before. God, what a feeling--that surge as she begins to plane and then, take her straight out towards the horizon. . . .

Eric Hoffer maintains somewhere that you can't get enough of that which you don't truly want. What the plumber truly wants is something or someone to make sense out of a life which staggers around the brink of the abyss of death. The man is caught in that terrible ambivalence of terror and attraction in regard to death which is the human condition in the absence of religion. He is also, viewed statistically, an ecological menace. This man with his priestly, Aquarian vocation, the purifier, . . . the purger of waste, is himself an agent of pollution and needless consumption.

Anthropologist John Bodley places much of the blame for the global environmental crisis on the "culture of consumption" (1976:63). He confines his discussion of this concept principally to the level of the American cultural system in relation to global resources, yet, following the

multi-level Batesonian model of culture mentioned earlier, one might say that culture level decisions are the result of millions of individual decisions. It may be assumed on the basis of modern psychology that many of these individual decisions are made at subconscious as well as conscious levels and as the result of subliminal as well as explicit stimuli. I like to think of these unconscious and conscious everyday instantaneous decisions as "microdecisions," similar to, but not identical with Thomas Schelling's (1971) concept of "micromotivation." The culture of consumption must be seen not only as one cultural form gobbling up the world's resources on an international basis, but as millions of individuals making millions of microdecisions to consume what is provided for them by the consumption-oriented institutions of their culture. What Rev. Snow has described is a subconscious microdecision. The plumber has decided to distract himself from contemplation of a natural process involving himself by consuming a consumer item.

Microdecisions are influential in the course of the culture in that they form part of Bateson's "metamessage" in the interaction of individuals. My microdecision, made subconsciously or with little conscious thought is perceived subliminally, subconsciously or barely consciously by persons around me and incorporated into the total data base upon which they base their own microdecisions. The culture of consumption operates internally upon this process, relying on the fact that the more we consume, the more everyone consumes. The less we produce for ourselves, the less we know how to produce for ourselves, and the less it becomes possible for us to produce for ourselves. Consumer items increasingly replace spiritual and social values as the latter buckle and disintegrate under the onslaught of modern technology and rationalism. To the degree that every American uses a new purchase to distract him/herself from the contemplation of aging and death, the denial of death feeds the culture of consumption.

The American Attitude Toward Death

In the general area of the American mental attitude towards death, a hot question has developed over whether the American attitude towards death, 1) can be characterized as one of denial, 2) can be characterized as one of acceptance, or 3) both of the above are true. Among those lining themselves up precisely on the denial side are:

- Paul Tillich, philosopher (Dumont and Foss 1972:39)
- Ernest Becker, psychoanalyst (cf. 1973)
- existential philosophers in general (Shibles 1974:90)
- Warren Shibles, philosopher (1974:94-99)
- Phillippe Aries, historian (1975:150)
- Jessica Mitford, economist (1963:14)
- Richard Kalish, sociologist (Dumont and Foss 1972:38)
- Geoffery Gorer, anthropologist (Dumont and Foss 1972:42)
- Herman Feifel, psychologist (1977:4)
- Margaret Mead, anthropologist (Dumont and Foss 1972:44)
- Robert Blauner, sociologist (1966:385)
- Consumer Reports*, consumer advocate organization (1977:9)
- Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, psychiatrist (1969)

The denial school, led by Jessica Mitford, cites elaborate life-simulation procedures performed by undertakers, the use of euphemisms for death, the general taboo on death--which is said to resemble the former taboo on sex, the attitude of the medical profession that death is a professional failure to be avoided at all costs, and so on. It seems to me that their argument is supported by the existence of the "death with dignity" movement, a phenomenon brought about largely by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. That such a movement came about so swiftly and with such emotional force is a statement that there was something to react against. While this movement is very prominent in the literature, media, and medical profession at the moment, it does not appear to have had much impact on American culture anywhere but in California when it comes to actual decision-making regarding death. *Consumer Reports* (1977:16) reports:

[Charles A.] Lindburgh's desire to work out the details of his own funeral and burial is rare in the annals of the American way of death. . . . It is one thing to consider death in the abstract . . . it is another to . . . plan for it.

That the taboo on death is still quite in effect in contemporary America is illustrated by the following anecdote. When I first began to consider the subject of this paper, having been isolated from the direct experience of American culture by my ten year residence in Mateel, I questioned whether Jessica Mitford's book was not obsolete. Perhaps, I thought, the differences I observed in Mateelian attitudes from the ones I remember from America were simply a reflection of changing attitudes in America as a whole. Such doubts were laid to rest that very day when I received in the mail at my new address in Pullman, Washington, an advertisement for a funeral insurance policy. Ornamented in objectionable lurid purple (it was Purple Shield), the envelope was nevertheless labeled "this envelope contains information on funerals. If you find this subject objectionable, you need not open," indicating that someone must find it objectionable to consider death and funerals.

On the acceptance side the forces are a bit thinner:

Talcott Parsons, sociologist (1963:62)
 Riley and Goldwater, sociologists (Dumont and Foss 1972:53)
 English and American realistic novelists (Dumont and Foss 1972:54)
 Herbert Marcuse, economic philosopher (Dumont and Foss 1972:58)

Taking the "both of the above are true" position, Dumont and Foss conclude that both sides have equal merit, that the apparent polarization is a function of either/or methodologies, and that there clearly is a side-by-side existence of contradictory attitudes (1972:60) or a "cultural paradox" (1972:107) existing at the individual level. They call for research designed to allow for degrees of acceptance or denial or both and "multi-level analysis to uncover attitudes operating at both the intellectual-conscious and emotional-unconscious levels" (1972:107).

Gregory Bateson, in an early article on national character (1972:100-104), provides a model which would reconcile all three positions into what is probably a more realistic assessment of the situation. He suggests, particularly for western nations, with such rapid change and

crosscurrents of social opinion, that continuums of attitude be isolated which are relevant to particular cultures. Not all such continuums are relevant to all societies. He gives the example of dominance/submission as a relevant continuum for Nazi Germany, indicating that Germans could not be said to be either dominant or submissive, but that individual Germans were concerned with the question of dominance and submission and took a dominant or submissive role depending upon their perception of their own place within the society. The culture, in other words, requires the cognizance of particular questions and determines which question one must make decisions about.

Acceptance/denial of death appears to be a highly relevant continuum in American society. I would suggest that in the rapidly changing ideology of America, this continuum is related to the second continuum, traditional/modern, which is correlated with the continuum religious/secular. The sociological data supports this idea:

The elimination of death from speech and other forms of communication, along with the high priority given well-being and material consumption would thus be part of the pattern of industrial societies. One might say that this is generally true of the vast area of modern society that covers Northern Europe and America, but that it meets with resistance wherever the old ways of thinking still exist . . . among the populace of technocratic countries. The concern for modernity, in fact, depends as much on social and geographic conditions and . . . is still restricted to the educated classes [Aries 1975:153].

Since America is the most modern and generally educated of these industrial nations, one would expect that the concern for modernity would be less restricted in America. Therefore the denial aspect which goes along with modernity would predominate. Americans toward the middle of these continuums would reasonably exhibit the greatest ambivalence in their attitudes toward death and would be only too happy to follow the lines of least resistance laid down by the experts, i.e., the medical and undertaking professions.

My position is therefore that though both denial and acceptance exist and that the methodologies of social science so far, as Dumont and Foss suggest, are basically inadequate for dealing with such paradoxical situations, the evidence for America is much more convincing on the denial side. Dumont and Foss were forced to fill in their discussion of the acceptance position with their own ideas because numerically the authorities were lined up more on the denial side. Sociologically, more Americans are now urbanized, secularized and modernized than are rural, traditional/ethnic, or religious. Therefore it is reasonable to say that denial is the most correct characterization of the American attitude toward death.

To summarize, then, the increasing rationality of western culture has affected funeral practices by creating a number of technological changes which in turn brought about such widespread sociological changes as urbanization, high mobility and thus a breakdown of the extended family, alienation from social life and environment, secularization, compartmentalization, and numerous other such conditions. All of these

aided the rise of the undertaker, which diminished the importance of the community and the family in post-death activities and added to general passivity and orientation towards consuming instead of doing for one's self. This consumer orientation and passivity, added to the loss of shared post-death activities as a unifying principle, fed back to further those sociological processes which brought about the need for the undertaker to start with.

The increase in rationalism also had a direct philosophical impact by reducing spiritual values and replacing them with the scientific worldview. This has created a widespread ambivalence towards death, as traditional practices breakdown under the impact of the processes listed above, and traditional beliefs collide head on with rationality. When the taboo on death is added in, the result is a "double bind" (Bateson 1972) situation in which the rational view requires expertise, efficiency, and non-emotional behavior while the traditional view (and perhaps some intrinsic psychological need) requires emotion, ritual, and social interaction. No one can talk about it because it is a taboo subject. As a double bind, the American way of dealing with death adds to the anxiety and mental ill health attendant upon death rather than relieving it. The only outlet the bereaved have, as in so many other situations in American life, is to consume, and over-consumption is one of the major forces destroying the environment (Bodley 1976:63-33).

Mateel

Introduction

The word "Mateel" refers to both a community and the space in which it is located. The space is a geographical area in northern California roughly approximating the upper watersheds of the Eel and Mattole rivers, from whence the name derives. The community is somewhat more difficult to define. It definitely does not include all of the residents of the area referred to as Mateel. Many of these residents would exclude themselves in horror from any identification with the people who call themselves the Mateel community. Others have arrived too recently to understand the importance or meaning of the name and to either identify or disidentify with it. Still others would exclude themselves out of a generalized distaste for labeling or even recognizing social entities beyond the individual. Nevertheless, such an entity clearly exists and is acknowledged by large numbers of people in the naming of community based organizations such as the Mateel Community Center and the Mateel Credit Union. I am using it here to designate, as I have explained, a cultural system with mental properties, to which individuals relate to greater or lesser degree.

The name Mateel has only recently come into general use, having been coined by a local poet who himself long resisted any sort of collective identification. It is thus highly significant, representing simultaneously self-recognition as a collective entity and the inseparability of the entity from the place in which it was created. Prior to this name, Mateelians referred to themselves, and many still do, as "the hill people" or the "people" leaving it to others to describe them as "hippies." Theodore Roszak's (1969) word "counter-culture," while accurate and descriptive, has

never been used at the local level in Mateel by either hill people or the "locals," i.e., the population which occupied the area immediately prior to the arrival of the hill people. The present total population of the area called Mateel is now very strongly influenced culturally by the presence of the hill people, who have been there perhaps twelve years, and the total population in fact may be numerically dominated at some times of the year by hill people.

While Mateel includes the towns of Redway, Briceland, Whitethorn, Garberville, Phillipsville, Miranda, Harris, and Alderpoint, the community referred to by the name could still be accurately referred to as the "hill people" as it is in the hills surrounding these mostly riverside towns, that the Mateel community was born and is sustained and in which the majority of those individuals who would accept the name as referring to themselves live. (While no infallible diagnostic features may be offered for Mateelians, an individual's acceptance of either this label or that of "hill people" is a fairly good rule-of-thumb.) In recent years, hill people have had increasing influence on the towns, and many hill people now reside permanently in town. Yet the distinctive cultural entity which is the subject of this paper arose through the interaction of urban refugees who sought a more healthy and meaningful life in a rural, even wilderness, setting.

As I have said, a basic assumption of this paper is that the cultural system emerging in Mateel differs sufficiently from standard American culture to be studied as a system in itself. Its component parts, interacting with each other, tend toward increasing cohesion and homogeneity. Aspects of this system which make little sense in the context of American culture, or which are routinely dismissed by social scientists and journalists as fads or "California cultism" (Harris 1974:208-228), are seen as making perfect sense when viewed in context and with reference to each other. As in any cultural system, the parts must be understood in terms of the whole, and the cultural system seen in terms of its own internal logic, if an objective understanding of it is to be attained.

While I would not argue that the system under study merits status as a "culture," I would argue that within the pluralistic heterogeneous and exceedingly complex set of phenomena referred to as American culture, the culture of Mateelians constitutes a sub-system sufficiently cohesive, sufficiently identifiable, and sufficiently homogeneous to be studied as a system of its own, and one equal in these qualities to many ethnic groups and religious groups which have been studied as subcultures (Bennett 1967).

Mateelians are largely sixties and seventies "dropouts." The central characteristic they share is discontent with the society in which they were enculturated and a basic desire to avoid the life they perceived society as having in store for them. The culture they have generated, starting from more diverse backgrounds than is generally thought to be the case, reflects this element of discontent and the "countering" measures which have evolved at individual and supra-individual levels against it. But it would be a mistake to depict Mateelian culture as a simple reversal of American culture. What began as discontent and exile (self-imposed and otherwise),

otherwise), evolved through the reversals which form the basis of Mateelian thought, into new approaches to old problems which combine elements from a quite American past with elements borrowed from other cultures and elements which are unique and futuristic.

Methodology

This analysis of Mateelian attitudes and practice is based upon observations made during a ten year period of residence and participation and upon a summer of intensive involvement with a particular Mateelian group. The data thus fall into two categories, those derived from observation, as a member of the culture, of the activities attendant to several deaths, and those derived from intensive observation, specifically as an anthropologist, with the production of a play dealing largely with death. Although, of course, the distinction between participant and observer at the level of my own consciousness is more conceptual than empirical in any case--a fact which is inevitable and should be in ethnography--my role as defined by those around tended to remain clear. As a friend, lover, and neighbor to deceased and bereaved persons, I was in every way a member of the community, albeit one who happened to have a particular interest in the observation of social details. As observer of the generation of the play, I was defined and accepted as an anthropologist with an incidental function to the group, that of script person, as well as longtime friend and neighbor to members of the cast.

As a member of the Mateelian community, I was involved either remotely or closely with a total of twelve deaths over the ten year period. In most cases, the deceased was someone I knew and had interacted with and to whom I was linked through close mutual friends or family. In three cases I felt myself personally involved with the deceased to the point where I myself grieved. In no case was the deceased so close to me that my ability to observe objectively, insofar as this term is ever applicable, could be called into question.

I was actively involved, along with many others, in the funeral arrangements for two of these people. In one of the two I was involved in construction of the casket, music at the funeral, helping the family clean house and care for children, digging of the grave, and errand running. In the other I spent most of my time in the company of the person principally arranging the funeral during the days immediately before and after it. In one case of the total twelve, it was the child of my closest friend who was dying and I was party to her experience for the preceding year, although I was not present at the child's funeral.

The second source of data, a play produced by an improvisational theater group known as Pure Shmint, was entitled *Vibram Soul*. It was improvised through a process closely resembling psycho-drama over a period of one to two years. It was performed several times in the Mateel area, twice in Berkeley, and once in Arcata, California. I believe that when allowances are made for the differences between industrial civilizations and primitive societies, a cogent case can be made that this play is in many ways analogous in function and origin to myths enacted in primitive societies. Following Jung (1964:81), I would maintain that the play, as a

projection of the unconscious contents of individual minds in the culture, is a projection of the collective unconscious of the culture and that therefore the symbols and construction of the play may be analyzed in the same manner that a dream or myth may be analyzed to discover the underlying meaning. My method of doing this is derived from the work of Claude Levi-Strauss (1969).

If one accepts a Batesonian conception of group mind, with group level thought resulting from the selection of random ideas by a group level structure, then the play is a representation of a mostly unconscious Mateelian self-image and reveals implicit assumptions about death, ecology, kinship, social relations, cosmology, and many ethnographically crucial ideas. The true test of this idea is audience response. Does the culture accept the myth? In each performance of the play in Mateel, the house was jammed with Mateelians of all ages from birth to old age. It was manifestly clear that it was more than an entertainment, with audience input occurring freely at crucial points in the form of spontaneous lines inserted by the audience, rib-aching laughter, footstomping, clapping, whistling, and hoots, boos, and hisses at the villain. Controversial lines at times even provoked intra-audience exchanges, corresponding to tensions existing in the real life of the community. Serious scenes were met with a reverent silence. The point here is that the audience clearly perceived itself to be a part of the performance and was not *passively receiving*. Whereas it might be argued that there is no difference between this description and that of an Elizabethian audience at a Shakespearean play, it is the ethos, the emotional tone of the audience which is different. Audience and cast were made to feel their unity, rather than their opposition. The last Mateel performance was followed immediately by a "boogie" (the unique Mateelian form of community dance) in which the unity of feeling accomplished by the performance was continued in the interaction of the dancers. Persons interviewed in the days following this performance were agreed that the way the play made them feel was different than the way they felt after other local theater performances. The contrast between the Berkeley and Mateel performances was significant. In Berkeley, the audience was warmly receptive, but it was an audience. In Mateel, the audience was part of the ceremony.

At the time when I joined Pure Shmint (insofar as one may be said to "join" an avowedly anarchistic group) as script person, the play had been performed and was being rehearsed for performances in Berkeley and again in Mateel. Since there was never until this point a written script, each performance, indeed, each rehearsal, was different from the last. The play was constantly revised, replayed, reinterpreted, and in general "hassled over" providing a truly unique opportunity for a person with a notebook, tape recorder, and camera to document the actual generation of a modern myth through the interaction of highly individual individuals. That any consensus at all was reached, that it was sufficiently agreed upon to be presented as a performance and that this performance was so accepted as to be in fact a ritual enactment of culturally held ideas, is a testament to the dynamic nature of culture. It is also a paradigm of the way in which Mateelian culture was in fact generated.

For three months I was officially a member of Pure Shmint. It was my function to tape record rehearsals and transcribe them into scripts, keeping track of alternative lines and maintaining a sort of "average" script for purposes of editing and generally aiding the memory of various persons involved. For my own purposes, and with the full approval of the cast, I also taped conversations, kept notes of interactions, took dozens of photographs, and informally interviewed members of the group.

The flexibility and dynamic quality resulting from the basis of the play on continuing interaction was perceived as extremely valuable and was jealously guarded. An example of this is provided by the initial resistance to my "freezing" the script by getting it down on paper. Several members of the cast were quite opposed to the procedure and only consented when the current director (the play had several directors at various times) and the Berkeley producer expressed a need for a written script. However, as the taping/transcribing procedure developed and its usefulness and my discretion and reverence for the improvisational nature of the play was demonstrated, the resistance diminished and, as is the case in most ethnography, the observed became accustomed to the observer.

Vibram Soul

My comparison of the play to a myth rests largely upon the manner in which the play was created. Before each "rehearsal" the entire cast engaged in an analysis of the last rehearsal of a particular scene. From this a hypothetical plot line would usually be developed, a sort of "what if . . ." proposal. The scene would then be tried with the hypothetical change to see how it affected the way the other characters "felt" the scene and what kind of new lines emerged. At any point any one of the actors in the scene could stop it in order to discuss some insight, problem, or observation about the change. At that point anyone present might be drawn into an intense, often highly emotional, discussion of how closely the scene corresponded to what "really" would happen. So compelling was the group involvement, in fact, that it was well nigh impossible to avoid putting in one's "two cents," even if one were as highly motivated to silence as I was. Complete chaos was avoided, however, by the recognition of those who were frequently present at rehearsals that overinput would be dysfunctional to the procedure. If that recognition faltered, however, the director often emphatically reminded the group of this fact. The procedure by which the script was generated, then, relied upon the ability of the actors to "feel" themselves into a hypothetical plot and to reach a group agreement on whether any one line "fitted" with the rest of the plot and with what would actually be expected to happen in the real life of Mateel.

The degree to which the actors felt identified with their characters soon became obvious to me. Frequently the cast seemed to forget if they were acting at any given moment or if it was part of the play and character names during rehearsals sometimes completely replaced the names of the actors. Lines of script cropped up constantly in offstage banter and some became almost folk sayings, so appropriate were they to the normal life of Mateel. I have had occasion to observe the rehearsal of other productions, both in Mateel and elsewhere, and am aware of the usual degree of character identification to expect in any dramatic production. This play was unique

in that the actors consciously made an attempt to reveal subconscious aspects of themselves and that the characters thus developed were so recognizably Mateelian that the line between fantasy and reality was frequently blurry for actors and audience alike. Interviews with the actors corroborate this observation. Significantly, one of the frequently noted aspects of primitive ritual is that those enacting mythical figures are often expected to "become" the figure and will say that they "were" Lion, Eagle, or Coyote.

The characters in the play thus correspond to easily recognizable Mateelian stereotypes. "Jack" is Mr. Everyhippie, noncommittal, following generally the line of least resistance, a conscientious environmentalist, farmer, and craftsman, but preferring to be apolitical until really pushed, anti-intellectual but concerned with the deeper questions of life and death, although as the plot suggests, not enough. "Spring" is the spiritual seeker, sincere if somewhat silly, following a guru whose photo rests on an altar in her home. Celibate, meditative, unrelentingly positive, she is in some ways the unattainable Mateelian ideal, though in caricature. As Jack's "ex-old lady," Spring provided contrast to his great human fallibility and between the actual and the ideal in Mateel.

The silliness of Spring's spirituality is, I believe, the result of a pervasive sense of irony in Mateelian culture brought about by ridicule from non-Mateelians and a healthy sense of self-criticism. It is the same principle which motivates them to laughingly call themselves "freaks" and to call marijuana "dope".

The tension between Jack and Spring reflects the tension in Mateelian culture between lingering rationalism and growing spirituality, but they laugh at spirituality because that is the deviant aspect most obvious to the outside world. They laugh to beat others to it. The need for humility in spiritual pursuits may also figure into the caricature-like quality of the Spring character. Were Spring not a slightly foolish figure, she could be taken as a judgemental statement about the outside world, an implicit statement of the superiority of Mateelian culture and that is the last statement a truly superior people would make, by Mateel standards.

Jill is the female counterpart of Jack, coming to Spring for spiritual advice, but unable to fast or give up men. As Jack's "new lady," with Spring's loving consent, she is the vehicle through which Spring's view is presented again to semi-skeptical Jack.

"George," Jill's "ex-old man," is the arch-villain, representing the worst of Mateelian types, the individual who has accepted only the superficial side of the Mateelian culture, and none of the fundamentals. He grows marijuana for profit alone, not for joy, and takes no pride in his product. He drinks booze excessively, aiming at contraction rather than expansion of consciousness. He hustles Jill for her food stamps, threatens to kidnap their child, throws her off their land when she gets a new boyfriend, is a suspect "rip-off" and in the final scene, kills Jack more or less accidentally during a jealous fight.

The dancers, "Life," "Death," and "Prana" (meaning "the breath of life" in Hatha Yoga doctrine) form the dream, fantasy, and afterdeath sequences. The dance sequences are the most revealing in terms of the Mateelian perception of Life and Death as natural processes and themselves as subject to them. Also the identification of Mateelians with primitive peoples is revealed in their depictions of Life and Death. Death, danced by a beautiful earth-colored black male dancer, wears a mask made of the pelvic bone of a deer. This is an item which members of the audience old and young can readily identify since deer bones abound in the oak woods around Mateel. It is an especially clear symbol of both death and its status as a natural process. Death dances in primitive rhythms to the sound of primitive instruments--drums, rattles, and plastic bullroarers.

Life is a woman in light green leotard painted amply with vegetational motifs. The effect is a nude woman covered with plant life, i.e., Mother Earth. In the opening scene Death and Life fight over Prana, the living human. They resolve their differences in a *pas de deux* which becomes a *manage á trois* when Prana is finally embraced by both at once. The symbolic implication is clear to everyone--you cannot have a living human without both Life and Death.

The extreme involvement of Mateelians with their environment is revealed in Jack's response to his land partner Larry, who has complained of loneliness since his move from New York City.

Larry: I shoulda stayed in the city. At least in the city, there were millions of people. Sure, I was alone, but I was alone with millions of people. Here, I'm alone by myself.

Jack: Oh, Larry, you're not by yourself. Settle down, huh? You got friends that love you, Larry. You have a piece of land with a nice little house. And lookit where you're living, Larry, lookit those gracious, rolling hills, that vast expansive sky. Breath in those negative ions, Larry. You know what it is? You're depressed. When I'm depressed like you, Larry, I just take a walk in the forest and I walk until I find a tree that's just right and I sit under that tree until I feel at peace again.

The spiritual ideal in dealing with necessary environmental practices is presented by Spring:

Spring: Well, I've thought about it for a long time. And I've meditated on it, too. I threw the I Ching and I did the Tarot, and I even looked into a crystal ball, and I finally came to my decision. I'm going to cut down a tree.

The Mateelian group ideal is revealed in the following conversation between Jill and Spring, who have run into each at the laundromat, the scene of many a dramatic event in Mateel:

Jill: (who has just been invited by the female biker, Loretta, to have a drink at the local bar) It sounds like fun, Loretta, but I don't think there'd really be any guy in that bar my type.

There's not enough men around here. And it's not like we all grew up here together, we just don't fit. It's not like we're part of the same tribe.

Spring (shocked): But Jill, we are all part of the same tribe. Really, we're all in this area together for a reason. It really is group karma. We're all here to bring in the New Age together. I know it.

Jill: But if this is group karma, why am I so lonely?

The last line brought one of the longest laughs in the Mateel performances, having hit squarely upon one of the more pronounced cultural tensions.

One of the central themes of the play is the dynamic which comes from Jack and Jill as lovers on the one hand and Jack and Death on the other. While, after a year of living with Jack, Jill becomes frustrated that their relationship seems to have remained superficial, Death persistently haunts Jack in his dreams, stalking him and following him closely, peering over his shoulder, but dancing away unseen each time Jack tries to turn around fast enough to see who is behind him. While Jill calls for him to "open up" and love her and appears in his dreams as the source of higher consciousness, Jack can see neither the higher consciousness of love nor death. Speaking of Spring's guru, Jack reveals his conscious view of death.

Jack: I don't know, I tried to get into her trip. I really gave it an honest try. But he'd say these off-the-wall things like "Death is not necessarily life, and life is not necessarily death. And neither one is necessarily necessary." Now what in the hell does that mean? What the hell does he know about death? What do I know about it? You know, I go to cemeteries, and I see the tombstones. I see the dead deer on the county road. I don't know, I don't know anything. I know he doesn't know anything. But I do wonder where the spirits of those little creatures go when they die. Well, I gotta go do my laundry.

One may observe in the play the same ambivalence described for the American death attitude. At the beginning, though Jack maintains a basic Mateelian honesty in declaring that "no one knows" about death, symbolically denies him. With Death always dancing just behind him, he feels only a nameless fear which is not amenable to direct rational inspection, i.e., he cannot see it. He sneers at Spring with her guru, having left her when she became non-rational, not to mention celibate, yet the implication is that if he could only raise his own consciousness, both love and death would yield to him. In one dream sequence, Jill, dressed in marijuana leaves, a symbol of growth and consciousness, appears to him just as he has once again missed recognizing Death as the source of his fear. He is struck by her unearthly beauty and forgets his fear, but when he moves toward her, he is awakened by George pounding on the cabin door, i.e., the intrusion of lower consciousness.

After Jack has been killed and has encountered several confusing experiences in his post-death journey (which, incidentally, are based upon the literature on post-death experiences collected by Kubler-Ross and her

associates), he finally goes to his favorite spot in the woods, leans on a tree, and realizes that he is dead and that, furthermore, he blew it. He never completely realized that he could have "made his own reality" free from fear by loving. When Jack finally accepts Death is when he realizes that "reality turns out to be whatever you want it to be," i.e., that cause and effect are not what science said they were, that Nature is complex and unknowable rationally and that when in a higher state of consciousness of which love and unity with Nature are parts, we make our own reality--alive or dead. In this state of acceptance, he then turns to Death just behind him, with love, and embraces him. Death gently lays him down to rest. It is a moving scene and the audience, many of whom have seen the play several times, is always moved.

Death Related Behavior

There can be no statement made at this point about the average Mateelian death, because there have not been enough deaths in the community to make a very significant sample. What follows is an analysis of what has happened for the manifestation of commonly held beliefs which have been observed from other areas of Mateelian life, including the play. The deaths which have occurred provide examples of the way in which the highly naturalistic worldview of Mateelians is reflected in their death practices.

Firstly, death presents no double bind in Mateel because although there is ambivalence, there is no taboo on it. As the play demonstrates, this ambivalence, like so many others in Mateelian culture is seen as something to be dealt with and overcome. I have had numerous occasions to observe this. The only restraint on the subject comes from a desire not to cause pain to the bereaved or the family of the dying. Perhaps the most illustrative of this point is the case of Norma and her son Isaac (all names are fictitious). Isaac was born with a defective heart. Doctors who examined him after his home birth informed Norma and Andy, Isaac's father, that the child could not possibly live more than a few days, and that they should not even name him lest they make the parting more painful. Norma and Andy, in a monumental rejection of the wisdom of science, kept the child alive for four years. Although they repeatedly took him to doctors all over the country, the prognosis never changed. Isaac was widely proclaimed as a miracle but the medical advice was that it could not possibly last. During that four years everyone in the area knew that Isaac would probably die soon, yet no none ever exhibited anything but the most natural kind of loving inquiry to Norma or Andy. They experienced not the avoidance of dying, but acceptance on the part of the community. One day, when it was clear that he was failing, I ran into Norma in the grocery store and asked about Isaac. Norma looked me straight in the eye and said in a steady voice., "It will soon be over, because this week he will either recover or die." It is this kind of unrelenting courage and honesty, the direct facing of reality which characterizes the Mateelian attitude toward death as well as life.

Again, I met Joseph two days before his death of leukemia. He was living with his male lover in a beautiful handcrafted redwood cabin they had built together and lived in for the preceding four or five years. Though I had only come to inquire about renting a live-in school bus from them, we

quickly discovered a mutual interest and in typical Mateelian fashion, proceeded to engage in a six-hour conversation. Joseph was ill with what looked to me like bronchitis or pneumonia. Every time he coughed, he would look at me warmly and say, "I'm dying." I took it each time to be a joke. Two days later he was dead. It was then I remembered that he had told me of a bout with hepatitis some years earlier in which he had forsworn the medical profession entirely and resolved to handle his own medical problems. When I remembered this I believed that he knew when he was speaking, maybe only partly consciously, that he had incurable leukemia and had chosen to spend his last days in the peace of his own home with his family. This was confirmed as a possibility by a close mutual friend who was with him when he died. This story illustrates several points; the strength of Mateelian rejection of the scientific worldview with its experts and technology and the absolute insistence of Mateelians that everything be "up front" as well as the fact that persons dying in the context of a culture which places emphasis upon spiritual values, social cohesion, and experience of natural processes, have been able to face their own death or the death of a relative in an honest and meaningful way.

A third example of these points is the friend who confirmed my guess about the possibility that Joseph was aware of his approaching death. This friend, who had been helping Joseph in his self-diagnosis and treatment, died within the year herself of an unknown ailment, probably stomach cancer. She had never consulted a medical person about it. A week or so before her death, I asked her to help me with a musical project, not realizing, because the change had been so gradual, the extent of her illness. She explained that she was too ill to help, then dismissed that subject entirely and spoke to me for an hour about death and reincarnation. She appeared to be in every way in a state of acceptance. Her last words to her husband, which he shared freely with her friends (in the typical Mateelian spirit of sharing) were, "You think I'm dying, but I'm not." He himself reported that he was unsure whether she meant that she did not believe herself to be dying or whether it was a statement about life after death. My interpretation in the context of her conversation with me, however, was unambiguously that it was a statement of acceptance and belief in life after death.

The point of these descriptions, to summarize, is both the lack of a taboo and the fact that persons dying in a context of consciousness and lack of alienation from nature are able to face death in a more meaningful way than appears to be the case in America.

A second general statement about deaths in Mateel is that funeral arrangements are seen as both therapy and as the responsibility of the entire community. Universally, if the body is disposed of by Mateelians rather than taken to the place chosen by family members who are not Mateelians, the pervading opinion is that it is a matter for the community to handle as much as possible. It is unthinkable that those things which can be done by friends and family should be left to an undertaker to do.

In two cases, this involved the washing and dressing of the body by spouse and friends, handcrafting of the coffin by neighbors with donated materials, transportation of body and coffin in pickup trucks to the graveyard, and digging and closing of the grave. In one case, three friends of the deceased stayed with the body in the graveyard throughout the night preceding the funeral after transporting it from the funeral home eighty

miles away. This death occurred during the brief period of time in which the Mateel area was without a funeral home; remains are not ordinarily sent so far away. The bodies were buried in Briceland cemetery, which is, revealingly enough, located on land owned by the community-generated alternative school and near enough to it that school children routinely take shortcuts near the cemetery. Services were extremely informal.

Many more details could be marshalled which illustrate the great extra-familial involvement with the funeral. The point is that the overwhelming attitude of "doing it ourselves," co-operatively, is entirely consistent with a social cohesion born, in spite of everything, largely from the experience of living in the same environment together. People who fight fires together, work on washed out roads together, dig compost toilets together, raise roofs and water tanks together, run their own schools, birth their own babies, maintain their own ambulance service and health clinic, and entertain themselves with their own highly meaningful productions, also bury their own dead together. The homemade funeral in Mateel performs the same functions that it does in traditional societies. It reaffirms the reality of the social ties and provides a hardworking people with solace in working together.

A third point is that in every case a repugnance is expressed against unnatural procedures and consumerism. People who carefully compost their garbage do not approve of embalming. No plastic or chemical substances were ever seen in the hands of Mateelians when they were engaging in burial practices. A donation of foam rubber to line a coffin was rejected emphatically and the coffin was lined with moss from under the redwood trees. Clothes were chosen to bury the deceased from her own wardrobe, all cotton. Flowers were picked from organic gardens, not bought from florists, except for those brought by family members from outside Mateel. Coffins were constructed entirely of donated wood. One coffin was so beautifully crafted that when friends arrived in Eureka to pick up the body, the undertaker and his staff gathered to inspect the coffin and attempt to set up the friends in the coffin manufacturing business. This business deal was, of course, turned down, with some amusement at the difficulty experienced in trying to explain that such art came from love, not the profit motive.

A fourth point is that Mateelian funerals and memorial services clearly express the need for ritual. Mateelians have mostly rejected American rituals, therefore have no traditional steps provided for them in dealing with death. As a group they are greatly attracted to ritual in general and in their daily lives as individuals are accustomed to creating rituals for themselves and those around them. They create their own weddings and holidays and holiday celebrations. In the same way, they also create their own funeral ritual. It is felt and expressed that it is not the ritual itself which is important but the doing of it together.

Conclusion

The American worldview of science and pragmatism has resulted in deep changes in technology which have in turn affected every aspect of the social structure. The current American funeral and the current American way of

dying are reflections of these technological and social changes. In addition, it is here maintained that the American attitude toward death may feed back positively into the social system to increase those changes which have brought it about. The denial of death, a part and parcel of the alienation from nature which denies animal nature of humans in general, leaves a spiritual void. With the disappearance of religious values, socially rewarding activities and participant activities in general, Americans are left with nothing to do but shop and be entertained. Therefore they consume and overconsume. In overconsuming, they destroy the environment and reinforce all of the forces which led to the loss of those things which enabled them to incorporate the reality of death into their lives.

The Mateelian attitude toward death is characterized by active resistance to the ambivalence typical of Americans. This resistance is evidenced by the enactment of a mythlike play in which acceptance/denial is resolved into acceptance through an openness to the idea that humans create reality through consciousness. Further evidence is the insistence upon minimizing reliance on either medical or undertaking expertise in their actual dealings with death. Combined, these factors come out to simple responsibility. One is responsible for one's actions and one's consciousness. Awareness of death is part of this responsibility and the relegation of funeral activities to the community is a part of maintaining this awareness.

The emphasis is on acceptance and further, upon such a holistic view of Nature that humans are not seen as needing to accept or deny, only to be a part of the natural process. Death, in the words of Casteneda's (1971:63-65) Don Juan, is one's "advisor" and a constant recognition of death as a component of life is seen as desirable in achieving a proper perspective in making decisions about one's life:

Facing death leads one to consider how best to live. Inquiry as a goal allows one to examine what is important in life, and to inquire into goals themselves [Shibles 1974:preface].

That this idea is a basic tenet of existentialism does not in any way detract from its rediscovery and, what is more important, its *implementation* by Mateelians, who would prefer to express the idea more simply in what they believe to be the words of the Cheyenne: "Hoka Hey-it is a good day to die."

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