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THE SUPERORGANIC IN AMERICAN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY*

JAMES S. DUNCAN

ABSTRACT. The superorganic mode of explanation in cultural geography reifies the notion of culture assigning it ontological status and causative power. This theory of culture was outlined by anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie during the first quarter of the twentieth century, later elaborated by Leslie White, and passed on to Carl Sauer and a number of his students at Berkeley. In this theory culture is viewed as an entity above man, not reducible to the actions of individuals, mysteriously responding to laws of its own. Explanation, it is claimed must be phrased in terms of the cultural level not in terms of individuals. After demonstrating that a number of influential cultural geographers support this theory the central assumptions of the theory are subjected to a critical analysis. These assumptions include the separation of the individual from culture, the reification of culture, the assumption of internal homogeneity within a culture, the characterization of culture as a configuration of modal personality types and idealized values, and the implicit use of Pavlovian conditioning theory.

IN 1963 Harold Brookfield noted that cultural geographers "scarcely ever seek explanations in matters such as human behavior, attitudes and beliefs, social organization and the characteristics and interrelationships of human groups."¹ The situation has changed remarkably little in the past fifteen years. This paper examines the mode of explanation in cultural geography which reifies the notion of culture assigning it ontological status and causative power. In the process, that ontolog-

ical status renders the above questions of social psychology and social organization unproblematic. It should be added that reification is a fallacy by which mental constructions or abstractions are seen as having substance, i.e. independent existence and causal efficacy.² This is a widespread problem throughout geography and social science generally.³ Therefore the arguments presented have implications beyond the immediate subject matter of the essay.

Almost all major theories of man and society can be classified as either holistic or individualistic depending upon the nature of their

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¹ H. C. Brookfield, "Questions on the Human Frontiers of Geography," *Economic Geography*, Vol. 40 (1964), pp. 283-303; reference on p. 283.

² P. Berger and S. Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," *History and Theory*, Vol. 4 (1964-65), pp. 196-211.

³ For a discussion of the problem in cultural geography see M. B. Newton, Jr., and L. Pulliam-Di Napoli, "Log Houses as Public Occasions: A Historical Theory," *Annals*, Association of American Geographers, Vol. 67 (1977), pp. 360-83. For a discussion of the problem in other areas of geography see R. D. Sack, "Geography, Geometry and Explanation," *Annals*, Association of American Geographers, Vol. 62 (1972), pp. 61-78; R. D. Sack, "A Concept of Physical Space in Geography," *Geographical Analysis*, Vol. 5 (1973), pp. 16-34; and R. D. Sack, "The Spatial Separatist Theme in Geography," *Economic Geography*, Vol. 50 (1974), pp. 1-19. On reification in social science see D. C. Phillips, *Holistic Thought in Social Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

solution to the "problem of order" in society. Holist versus individualist explanation remains the subject of an important ongoing controversy in social science.⁴ Although they often do not make the issue explicit in their work, most social scientists are very much engaged in this controversy. In cultural geography and anthropology the form of holism around which the controversy centers is known as the superorganic.

The theory of culture as a superorganic entity was outlined by anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie during the first quarter of the twentieth century and later elaborated by Leslie White. Culture was viewed as an entity above man, not reducible to actions by the individuals who are associated with it, mysteriously responding to laws of its own. It was, moreover, this view of culture that came to dominate cultural geography. Specifically, this perspective was adopted by Carl Sauer as a result of his association with Kroeber and Lowie at Berkeley in the twenties and thirties and was subsequently passed on to his students.

Although many students of Sauer's "Berkeley School" frequently cite Kroeber's definition of culture and have neither rejected nor replaced it one cannot be entirely sure to what extent they embrace that definition. Wilbur Zelinsky, however, is exceptionally explicit in his use of the theory. If other cultural geographers do not support this thesis, they can nevertheless be faulted for citing and appearing to support it without qualification. Indeed, the ambiguity with which many cultural geographers address the question of the superorganic nature of culture reveals a failure to understand the implications of the position. This may have been exacerbated by Wagner and Mikesell's influential introduction to cultural geography in which they wrote "the cultural geographer is not [i.e. should not be] concerned with explaining the inner workings of

culture."⁵ Wagner has since reversed himself on this position, as has Mikesell, who recently wrote:⁶

Most geographers have adopted a laissez-faire attitude toward the meanings of culture, perhaps in a mistaken belief that agreement on this issue has already been achieved by anthropologists.

Geographers have not only frequently ignored the variety of alternative definitions of culture that could have been drawn from anthropology, but in accepting the superorganic concept of culture have also inadvertently chosen a theory which has come under devastating attack and has long since been rejected by the vast majority of anthropologists. While this in itself is no reason for geographers to follow their lead in rejecting the theory, it is surprising that there has been no attempt to defend the position against such criticisms. A lack of concern over theoretical debates outside geography may result from "regard[ing] the discipline as an autonomous enterprise set apart from the social or natural sciences."⁷ In any case, Mikesell has recently urged that geographers rectify the situation by giving "more serious thought to how they wish to use the concept of culture."⁸ This paper attempts to make a modest contribution to this endeavor by examining the concept of culture employed by a number of important cultural geographers in light of ongoing debates over the notion outside the field.

THE SEPARATION OF INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

Today in popular, nonacademic modes of thought the distinction between the individual and society is virtually taken for granted. This has not always been so.⁹ As Erich Fromm and others have suggested in medieval Europe "a person was identical with his role in society; he was a peasant, artisan, or knight, not an individual who happened to have this or that

⁴ For a general discussion of holism and individualism, see J. O'Neill, ed., *Modes of Individualism and Collectivism* (London: Heinemann, 1973). One of the best known critiques of holism is Karl Popper's, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1946). For a more recent discussion of holism in social science see Phillips, op. cit., footnote 3, and for a discussion of holism in geography see J. S. Duncan, "Holistic Explanation in Human Geography: The Case of the Culture Concept," unpublished manuscript, 1979.

⁵ P. L. Wagner and M. W. Mikesell, eds., *Readings in Cultural Geography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 5.

⁶ M. W. Mikesell, "Tradition and Innovation in Cultural Geography," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 68 (1978), pp. 1-16; reference on p. 12.

⁷ Mikesell, op. cit., footnote 6, p. 10.

⁸ Mikesell, op. cit., footnote 6, p. 13.

⁹ C. Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 2.

occupation.”¹⁰ Raymond Williams comments that the distinction between the individual and society (or culture) is embedded in the English language. This distinction, he claims gained currency at a particular point in history and has now established itself in our minds as absolute.¹¹

Most theories in social science today are based on the assumption that individuals are atomistic and thus independent of one another. This leaves unresolved the problem of accounting for the order one finds in society unless it is imposed by an external force from without. As mentioned above, there are two major solutions to this problem, one individualist, the other holist. The disagreement between adherents of the two positions is this: should we consider the large-scale social events to be the mere aggregate of the actions, attitudes, and circumstances of the individuals who participate in these events or suffer their results, as the case may be, or are the events to be explained in terms of “their own autonomous, macroscopic level of analysis?” Is it, to quote Dray, “social wholes . . . not their human elements [that] are the true historical individuals?”¹² Individualists such as J. W. N. Watkins claim that it is individuals who are the active forces, whereas holists such as Maurice Mandelbaum claim that it is social wholes that must be studied.¹³ Both positions assume that it is reasonable to argue that explanations must ultimately be framed either in terms of social wholes but not individual human agents or conversely that “rock bottom” explanations must be framed in terms of individuals but never social wholes. The assumption is that either individuals are logically prior to larger social wholes or vice-versa.¹⁴

Those external forces that have been invoked to mediate between atomistic individ-

uals include God, culture, laws, social contracts, absolute monarchs, norms, values, and the invisible hand in the marketplace. Individualists such as Hobbes viewed individuals as self-interested and predatory, incapable of cooperating without handing over their individual power to an absolute sovereign. Locke's solution is similar but more palatable. His external forces are institutions, laws, and principles.

The holists believe that large-scale events such as the decline of nations are autonomous and largely independent of the individuals who participate in them. Order, therefore, is achieved as these large-scale configurations “work themselves out,” or “seek their equilibrium.” One of the most important modern statements of the position of holism was made by Hegel. His concept of *Geist* (spirit) is perhaps the quintessential transcendental object from which are derived later holistic “solutions” such as Durkheim's “collective consciousness,” Parsons' “society” or Kroeber's “superorganic.”¹⁵ Durkheim's sociology is a classic example of transcendental holism. He viewed society *sui generis* as irreducible to individuals. He provides a critical logical link between Hegelian idealism and cultural anthropology because his work represents an indirect transmutation of Hegelian notions into a social science framework.¹⁶

Whenever I use the term holism below I will refer to the rather strong philosophical claim of “transcendental” holism in which the whole, not the individual parts, is the active, determining force.¹⁷ Individuals are the passive agents of this force; their apparent activity is attributed to their role as the “efficient” as opposed to the “formal” cause. This Aristotelian distinction is crucial to an understanding of any form of transcendental holism because lying behind every description of the

¹⁰ R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 75.

¹¹ Williams, op. cit., footnote 10, pp. 72–100.

¹² W. Dray, “Holism and Individualism in History and Social Science,” in P. Edwards, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), Vols. 3–4, pp. 53–58; reference on p. 53.

¹³ J. W. N. Watkins, “Ideal Types and Historical Explanations,” in H. Feigl and M. Brodbeck, eds., *Readings in the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1953), pp. 723–43; and M. Mandelbaum, “Societal Facts,” *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 6 (1955), pp. 305–17.

¹⁴ E. M. Gerson, “On Quality of Life,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 41 (1976), pp. 793–806.

¹⁵ Transcendental is used here in the Hegelian sense to refer to an entity such as *Geist* which transcends, in the sense of being greater than and determinant of, the individual parts which are held to be mere manifestations of it.

¹⁶ I do not mean to imply that Durkheim consciously attempted to apply Hegel's ideas to the study of society, only that his notion of society as a thing *sui generis* had pronounced Hegelian overtones and had the effect of casting a good deal of American social science in a particular Hegelian mold.

¹⁷ For a discussion of active versus passive conceptions of man, see M. Hollis, *Models of Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

actions of individuals is the assumption that these individuals are merely the agents who carry out the tasks determined by a transcendental formal cause, e.g. society, culture, and God. Unwary readers as well as the authors of relevant works may not always remember the logical implications of such a view, especially when placed in the context of empirical description.

THE SUPERORGANIC IN AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGY: KROEBER AND WHITE

Alfred Kroeber developed his thesis of the autonomy of culture in a seminal paper entitled "The Superorganic." This signaled the beginning of cultural determinism in American anthropology, a perspective that only began to lose its vigor in the 1950s.¹⁸ For Kroeber, the move from the individual to the social and cultural does not constitute a "link in a chain, not a step in a path, but a leap to another plane."¹⁹ He conceived of reality as composed of a number of levels beginning with the inorganic at the bottom, followed by the organic, which in turn is topped by a psychological or biopsychic level, and finally crowned by the social or cultural level.²⁰ Although each of these levels is connected to the levels immediately above and below, it "constituted a separate and distinct area of investigation with its own special facts and causal explanation."²¹ One could not reduce explanation at one level to that at another.

Kroeber and Lowie were very much concerned with the relationship of the individual to the superorganic milieu.²² This was in part

an attempt to distinguish anthropology from psychology and later from sociology by focusing on culture as an independent level of reality. By raising culture to a suprahuman level, the anthropologist had no need for individuals and therefore no need for psychological processes. Kroeber's view of culture as a thing *sui generis* was shared by Lowie, according to whom:²³

culture is a thing *sui generis* which can only be explained in terms of itself The ethnologist . . . will account for a given cultural fact by merging it in a group of cultural facts or by demonstrating some other cultural fact out of which it has been developed.

In "The Superorganic" Kroeber first addresses himself to the question of the relation of the individual to the socio-cultural level. "A thousand individuals do not make a society. They are the potential basis of a society; but they do not themselves cause it."²⁴ Rather it is the socio-cultural level which causes men to behave as they do.²⁵ "When a tide sets one way for fifty years, men float with it, or thread their course across it; those who breast the vast stream condemn themselves in advance to futility of accomplishment."²⁶ He continues: "The concrete effect of each individual upon civilization is determined by civilization itself."²⁷ One need not be concerned with the individual, Kroeber felt, because the individual is the mere agent of cultural forces. He is a messenger carrying information across the generations and from place to place.

The value code was central to Kroeber's notion of the superorganic and similarly for Durkheim and Talcott Parsons in sociology. Values allowed the superorganic to work, to grip men's minds and force them to conform to its will. The value code is seen as the superorganic equivalent of the genetic code. Whereas lower organisms are controlled genetically from within, man is controlled from without by values.²⁸

¹⁸ A. L. Kroeber, "The Superorganic," in *The Nature of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 22-51. Kroeber borrowed the term "superorganic" from the nineteenth century social determinist Herbert Spencer. See H. Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967); and F. W. Voget, *A History of Ethnology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), p. 365.

¹⁹ Kroeber, op. cit., footnote 18, p. 49.

²⁰ At a later date, Kroeber did distinguish between the social and the cultural level, although he considered both of them to be superorganic; see A. L. Kroeber and T. Parsons, "The Concepts of Culture and of Social System," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 23 (1958), pp. 582-83.

²¹ Voget, op. cit., footnote 18, p. 364.

²² F. W. Voget, "Man and Culture: An Essay in Changing Anthropological Interpretation," in R. Darnell, ed., *Readings in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 343-63; reference on p. 350; A. L. Kroeber, "The Eighteen Professions," in P. Bo-

hannon and M. Glazer, eds., *High Points in Anthropology* (New York: Knopf, 1973), pp. 102-06; Kroeber, op. cit., footnote 18; and R. H. Lowie, *Culture and Ethnology* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1917).

²³ Lowie, op. cit., footnote 22, pp. 17, 66.

²⁴ Kroeber, op. cit., footnote 18, p. 41.

²⁵ A. L. Kroeber, "On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes in Fashion," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 21 (1919), pp. 235-63.

²⁶ Kroeber, op. cit., footnote 18, p. 261.

²⁷ Kroeber, op. cit., footnote 18, p. 48.

²⁸ E. R. Wolf, *Anthropology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 43.

Kroeber and White were in basic agreement over the concept of the superorganic although they disagreed over other issues such as White's materialist conception of the world in which technology was a determining force.²⁹ White believed that man must be taken into consideration when examining the origin of culture, after which culture can be explained without reference to man, individually or collectively. "Man is necessary to the existence and functioning of the culture process, but he is not necessary to an explanation of its variations."³⁰ According to White, culture originated and is undergoing a continuous process of improvement because of man's "neurological ability to symbolize." Once culture had developed, it became extrasomatic, obeying laws of its new development quite independent of the laws governing its human carriers. Culture generates its own forms, independent of men, and those which are not useful to its purposes are discarded.³¹ This gradual evolution of culture is based upon flows of energy that are captured and put to work by a society through technology.

The concept of symbol plays an important role in White's theory of culture.³² The terms

symbol or symbolate, he believes, can be used to refer to human behavior and psychological processes; however, this is the province of psychology. Symbols can also be regarded in an extrasomatic context in direct relation to other symbols without the mediation of individuals; this he claims is a cultural process. A number of geographers, as we shall see, refer to this latter usage of the term symbol.

White is perhaps even more forceful than Kroeber in asserting the superorganic nature of culture.³³

If the behavior of a people is determined by its culture, what determines the culture? The answer is that it determines itself. Culture may be regarded as a process *sui generis*.

Culture, White tells us, is made possible through human carriers, but "we must consider it apart from its human carriers when we study its structure and processes."³⁴ He, like Durkheim, Kroeber, Lowie and other transcendental holists believes that culture cannot be reduced to the individual. Through these men this point of view has exerted a vast although decreasing influence on American cultural anthropology and, by extension, on American cultural geography.

THE SUPERORGANIC IN AMERICAN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Many well-known cultural geographers refer to Kroeber and White for their concept of culture. Since both of these anthropologists were known as the leading exponents of a superorganic theory of culture, one can only assume that the geographers in question subscribe to this theory. Not all such geographers may be aware of the full implications of Kroeber's extreme position. However, their work incorporates the form of the superorganic argument which rules out many critical social psychological and social organizational variables because of active, causal properties attributed to culture by the theory.³⁵

Carl Sauer was the leading figure in Amer-

York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 3-4; and White, op. cit., footnote 30, p. 548.

²⁹ White, op. cit., footnote 30, p. 548.

³⁰ White, op. cit., footnote 32, p. 5.

³¹ Some human geographers appear to have a holistic concept of culture which may not have its origins in Kroeber's superorganic theory. Many do single out Kroeber and White referring to their theory in particular. Attention is devoted here only to these latter geographers.

²⁹ I am indebted to Clifford Geertz (personal communications) for pointing out that Kroeber unlike White was aware of some of the difficulties involved in the superorganic position. In certain of his writings he shows uncertainty as to the strength of cultural determinism. It must be stated that even late in his career Kroeber held the view that culture was *sui generis*. See: Kroeber and Parsons, op. cit., footnote 20; A. L. Kroeber, "The Personality of Anthropology," in E. A. Hammel and W. S. Simmons, eds., *Man Makes Sense* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970), pp. 41-45. For the links between Kroeber and White see: J. H. Steward, *Alfred Kroeber* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 48; A. L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1952), Vol. 47, p. 28; L. A. White, *The Science of Culture: A Study of Man and Civilization* (New York: Grove Press, 1944), p. 90; D. Hymes, *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 186, 189; R. L. Bee, *Patterns and Processes: An Introduction to Anthropological Strategies for the Study of Socio-Cultural Change* (New York: Free Press, 1974), p. 122; and M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Crowell, 1968), p. 332.

³⁰ L. A. White, "Culturology," in D. L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), Vol. 3, pp. 547-51; reference on p. 549.

³¹ L. A. White, "The Concept of Culture," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 61 (1959), pp. 227-51.

³² L. A. White, *The Concept of Cultural System* (New

ican cultural geography. The principal themes of this field, cultural ecology, the diffusion of artifacts and ideas, and the cultural perception of landscape were all present in his work. Sauer acknowledged his intellectual debt to the German cultural geographers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially Ratzel, Schluter, and Hahn.³⁶ Sauer considered Ratzel above all others to be the father of cultural geography.³⁷ Ratzel in turn was greatly influenced by Herbert Spencer, an exponent of the superorganic theory of culture who, in fact, coined the term "superorganic."³⁸ Sauer was also highly influenced by ideas current in American anthropology. During his first years at Berkeley he established close ties with the Department of Anthropology and in particular with A. L. Kroeber and R. H. Lowie.³⁹ In fact it was Lowie who introduced him to the work of Ratzel.⁴⁰ From this association Sauer assimilated the theory of culture that was to pervade all his subsequent teaching and research.⁴¹ Sauer mentions the importance to

him of the Berkeley anthropologists in "The Morphology of Landscape" in which he refers approvingly to Kroeber's *Anthropology*.⁴² Additional evidence of the influence of Kroeberian anthropology on Sauer lies in the fact that the themes of historical reconstruction, culture area, and diffusion, which Sauer introduced into American geography in the 1920s were those that Boas and his students Kroeber, Wissler, Lowie, Goldenweiser, Herskovits, and Spier had been working on since Boas first became interested in such topics in the late 1890s.⁴³ Although the dominant influence on Sauer's conception of culture undoubtedly was Kroeber it is of interest to note that he also refers favorably to Spengler, another superorganicist, in "The Morphology of Landscape."⁴⁴

It is difficult to ascertain to what extent Sauer communicated his notion of culture to his students. Spencer suggests that in the 1930s Sauer encouraged his students to familiarize themselves with the concept of culture. Parsons states that "everyone took courses with Kroeber and with Robert Lowie," and Kniffen writes "I got an awful lot from Kroeber. I had more courses in anthropology than I did in geography."⁴⁵ However Sopher has suggested that during the late 1940s and early 1950s, graduate students in geography at Berkeley were not necessarily expected to read Kroeber or other culture theorists for it was assumed that they simply "knew what culture was."⁴⁶ Possibly this suggests that Sauer drew on the anthropologists' concept of culture during his first years at Berkeley and urged his students to do likewise, but that sub-

³⁶ C. O. Sauer, "Recent Developments in Cultural Geography," in E. C. Hayes, ed., *Recent Developments in the Social Sciences* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1927), pp. 154-212; C. O. Sauer, "Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904)," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 13 (1931), pp. 120-21; C. O. Sauer, "Cultural Geography," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 6 (1931), pp. 621-24; C. O. Sauer, "The Fourth Dimension of Geography," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 64 (1974), pp. 189-92; and C. O. Sauer, *Sixteenth Century North America: The Land and the People as Seen by the Europeans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

³⁷ Sauer, op. cit., footnote 36, "Ratzel"; C. O. Sauer, "The Formative Years of Ratzel in the United States," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 61 (1971), pp. 245-54, reference on p. 253; and Sauer, op. cit., footnote 36, "Fourth Dimension," p. 190.

³⁸ P. E. James, *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas* (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1972), p. 223.

³⁹ J. E. Spencer, "The Evolution of the Discipline of Geography in the Twentieth Century," in *Geographical Perspectives*, Vol. 33 (1974), pp. 20-36; reference on p. 26; J. E. Spencer, "What's in a Name?—The Berkeley School," *Historical Geography Newsletter*, Vol. 5 (1976), pp. 7-11; reference on p. 9; J. Leighly, "Carl Ortwin Sauer, 1889-1975," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 66 (1976), pp. 337-48; reference on p. 341; J. Parsons, "Carl Ortwin Sauer," *The Geographical Review*, Vol. 66 (1976), pp. 83-89; and J. Parsons, "The Later Sauer Years," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 69 (1979), pp. 9-15; references on pp. 11, 13.

⁴⁰ Sauer, op. cit., footnote 36, "Fourth Dimension," p. 192.

⁴¹ Leighly, op. cit., footnote 39, pp. 339-40.

⁴² Sauer, op. cit., footnote 36, "Fourth Dimension," p. 192; C. O. Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," in J. Leighly, ed., *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 315-50; reference on p. 349.

⁴³ Bee, op. cit., footnote 29, pp. 67-93.

⁴⁴ Sauer, op. cit., footnote 42, pp. 327-28.

⁴⁵ J. E. Spencer, "Carl Sauer: Memories about a Teacher," *The California Geographer*, Vol. 15 (1975), pp. 83-86; reference on p. 85; Parsons, op. cit., footnote 39, "Later Years," p. 13; F. B. Kniffen, "The Geographer's Craft—I: Why Folk Housing?," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 69 (1979), pp. 59-63; reference on p. 62; Trindell writes that "... the second generation of American cultural geographers was trained in the schools of Sauer and Kroeber at Berkeley." R. T. Trindell, "Franz Boas and American Geography," *The Professional Geographer*, Vol. 21 (1969), pp. 328-32; reference on p. 331.

⁴⁶ D. Sopher, personal communications.

sequently an acceptable definition of culture had been arrived at and therefore further exploration of the concept was no longer believed necessary.⁴⁷ Although not all cultural geographers refer directly to the work of anthropologists, a number do. Zelinsky for example, refers to Kroeber's *The Nature of Culture*, White's *The Science of Culture*, and Quigley's *The Evolution of Civilization*.⁴⁸ Zelinsky says that he assumes:⁴⁹

following in the footsteps of Alfred Kroeber and with some mental reservations, those of Leslie White, . . . that culture is to a large extent an autonomous, virtually "super-organic" system that functions and evolves according to its own internal logic and presumed set of laws . . . and does so with a large degree of freedom from individual or community control.

In their introduction to cultural geography, Wagner and Mikesell suggest that those readers interested in pursuing the notion of culture turn to White's *The Science of Culture*, Kroeber and Kluckhohn's *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, and Kroeber's *The Nature of Culture*.⁵⁰ Wagner and Mikesell also cite White's *The Science of Culture* for the notion of the symbol which as was mentioned above played a key role in his cultural determinism.⁵¹ Others such as Broek and Webb refer their readers to Kroeber's *Anthropology* and White's *Science of Culture* for a definition of culture.⁵² Carter refers to Kroe-

ber as does Spencer who refers not only to Kroeber and White but also to Bagby's *Culture and History: Prolegomena to the Comparative Study of Civilizations*.⁵³ Bagby it should be noted is a superorganicist who draws heavily on Kroeber and dedicates his book to him. It should also be added that these geographers do not discuss competing theories of culture.

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE SUPERORGANIC

Culture as External to Individuals

Kroeber and White distinguished between the province of biology (of which psychology was held to be a part) and the superorganic which consists of the cultural or social facts that transcend the individual and at the same time mold his actions. A number of cultural geographers have made similar assertions. According to Sauer, human geography is only concerned with the superorganic level of inquiry: "Human geography, then, unlike psychology and history, is a science that has nothing to do with individuals but only with human institutions, or cultures."⁵⁴

Similarly Zelinsky states:⁵⁵

we are describing a culture, not the individuals who participate in it. Obviously, a culture cannot exist without bodies and minds to flesh it out; but culture is also something both of and beyond the participating members. Its totality is palpably greater than the sum of its parts, for it is superorganic and supra-individual in nature, an entity with a structure, set of processes, and momentum of its own, though clearly not untouched by historical events and socio-economic conditions.

Although as Zelinsky sees it, a culture is something apart from individuals, it needs individuals to do its work.⁵⁶ This, as mentioned above, follows Kroeber and White's usage of the Aristotelian distinction between formal and efficient causes of an event. Men acting as efficient causes are usually referred to as

⁴⁷ This uncritical attitude toward the culture concept has been noted by Mikesell, op. cit., footnote 6, pp. 12-13; M. Mikesell, "Cultural Geography," in *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 1 (1977), pp. 460-64; reference on p. 460; and by P. Wagner, personal communications.

⁴⁸ W. Zelinsky, *The Cultural Geography of the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1973), pp. 3, 68; White, op. cit., footnote 29; C. Quigley, *The Evolution of Civilizations* (New York: Macmillan, 1961); and A. L. Kroeber, *The Nature of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

⁴⁹ W. Zelinsky, "The Use of Cultural Concepts in Geographical Teaching: Some Conspiratorial Notes for a Quiet Insurrection," in *Introductory Geography: Viewpoints and Themes*, Commission on College Geography, Publication No. 5 (Washington: Association of American Geographers, 1967), pp. 75-96; reference on pp. 75-76.

⁵⁰ Wagner and Mikesell, op. cit., footnote 5, p. 2; White, op. cit., footnote 29; Kroeber and Kluckhohn, op. cit., footnote 29; and Kroeber, op. cit., footnote 48, pp. 118-35.

⁵¹ Wagner and Mikesell, op. cit., footnote 5, p. 2; and White, op. cit., footnote 29.

⁵² J. O. M. Broek and J. W. Webb, *A Geography of Mankind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 48; A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948); and White, op. cit., footnote 29.

⁵³ G. Carter, *Man and the Land*, 2nd ed., (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), p. 562; J. E. Spencer, *Shifting Cultivation in South East Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in Geography), Vol. 19 (1966), p. 54; Kroeber, op. cit., footnote 52; White, op. cit., footnote 29; and P. Bagby, *Culture and History: Prolegomena to the Comparative Study of Civilizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

⁵⁴ C. O. Sauer, "Foreword to Historical Geography," in J. Leighly, ed., *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 351-79; reference on p. 358.

⁵⁵ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁶ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 71.

the "mere," "agents," "bearers," or "carriers" of culture.⁵⁷ The formal cause, culture, therefore becomes reified. It has power to do things.⁵⁸ Zelinsky states:⁵⁹

cultural process is one of the few great first-causes that shape those place-to-place differences, of phenomena on or near the earth's surface that we geographers study, and . . . this powerful nearly sovereign primal force should share star billing in our research and pedagogy, along with geomorphological agents, climatic process, biological process, and the operation of economic laws.

In *The Cultural Geography of the United States* he writes that "The power wielded over the minds of its participants by a cultural system is difficult to exaggerate."⁶⁰ He stresses the autonomy of culture claiming that it evolves out of the "reaction among newly juxtaposed cultural elements."⁶¹ He also states:⁶²

cultural forces we cannot yet identify have been at work sorting out potential church members in terms of social and economic characteristics and preferences for particular areas and environments.

Sauer also refers to the power of culture to do things, writing in "The Morphology of Landscape," "Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result."⁶³

Zelinsky asserts that there are six principles in cultural geography that "are at least tacitly accepted by our confreres" (other cultural geographers).⁶⁴ The first of these six is that "culture is a prime genetic factor, along with

physical and biological in shaping the character of places."⁶⁵ Clearly, Zelinsky believes that his fellow cultural geographers accept implicitly, if not explicitly, that culture is a superorganic entity.

Spencer and Thomas add an evolutionary aspect to this argument when they state that culture has grown powerful over the millennia and has now become a controlling force:⁶⁶

The individual progressive body of culture . . . [has] increased . . . in total strength. As we come toward the modern era it can be seen that ranking cultures have a strength and a context almost apart from the persons of the society possessing a given culture It sometimes appears that evolving American culture controls Americans, as in the mechanistic trend toward greater automation, whether we like it or not.

George Carter seems to adopt a cultural determinist stance when he writes:⁶⁷

we have studied many examples of culture at work. Thus in California, Indians, Mexicans, Spanish and Americans, in sequence, played their role in the identical environment, each making their choice of way of life from the numerous possibilities that existed in terms of their culturally determined perceptions.

Carter does leave a ray of hope for the individual however. Speaking of a particularly powerful and effective royal inspector in Colombia in the eighteenth century he states "Here we meet the role of the unusual individual and see that within a culture there is still room for the exercise of the individual will."⁶⁸ Clearly in Carter's opinion it is only the most powerful and "unusual" individual who is able to exert his individual will. Presumably the rest of us are, to use Kroeber's phrase, swept along by the cultural tide.

Mikesell, in his recent presidential address, stated that Brookfield's critique of cultural geography must be heeded and that "cultural geographers must try to deal not only with "material culture and livelihood" but also with "the workings of society and the reasons for human behavior."⁶⁹ However, Brookfield in this particular case adopting an individualist stance, claims that if geographers are to study process and not simply describe patterns they must study the behavior of small groups of individuals at the microscale. The view that

⁵⁷ J. E. Spencer and W. L. Thomas, *Cultural Geography* (New York: Wiley, 1969), p. 3.

⁵⁸ Price discusses the notion of formal and efficient cause in E. T. Price, "Aspects of Cause in Human Geography," *Yearbook*, Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, Vol. 25 (1963), pp. 7-19. He appears to accept Kroeber's notion that culture is the formal cause while man is the efficient cause (p. 17) although, unlike Kroeber he appears to be willing to grant man the ability to affect change upon the formal cause. This distinction is held in disdain by most philosophers today but retained by many social scientists who favor holistic forms of explanation. See R. Taylor, "Causation," in P. Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan, 1967), pp. 56-66; reference on pp. 56-57.

⁵⁹ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 49, p. 75.

⁶⁰ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 70.

⁶¹ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 78.

⁶² Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 99.

⁶³ Sauer, op. cit., footnote 42, p. 343. In later years Sauer had misgivings about this article. His misgivings concerned, however, the possibility of reconstructing the cultural and natural landscape and not the superorganic overtones of his culture theory.

⁶⁴ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 49, p. 78.

⁶⁵ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 49, p. 91.

⁶⁶ Spencer and Thomas, op. cit., footnote 57, pp. 559-60.

⁶⁷ Carter, op. cit., footnote 53, p. 532.

⁶⁸ Carter, op. cit., footnote 53, p. 458.

⁶⁹ Mikesell, op. cit., footnote 6, pp. 10-11.

fundamental explanation must be in terms of individuals is incompatible with the superorganic approach to explanation. Thus Mikesell's suggestion may be more radical than it appears at first, for it may entail the abandonment of the superorganic.⁷⁰

Critique of the Assumptions

The notion that there are distinct levels of reality, the organic (or psychological) and the superorganic (or cultural) has been attacked on the grounds that it presents methodological difficulties. In 1917, the same year Kroeber put forward his notion of the superorganic, Edward Sapir wrote a response entitled "Do We Need a Superorganic?" He challenged the notion of levels claiming that the method by which the psychological and cultural levels are distinguished "is essentially arbitrary." It is unclear how one decides which behaviors are explained at the individual level and which at the superorganic level.⁷¹ Also related is the problem of how, once one has divided reality into "separate scientific 'levels' complete and autonomous in themselves," does one put them back together again.⁷² Others have attacked the notion of autonomous levels on the grounds that there is no such thing as an individual apart from culture and that therefore the whole concept of levels is flawed.⁷³ Opler sums up this objection stating that "the truth

is that no human being is a mere organism unless he is a foetus or an imbecile."⁷⁴ In short the view that reality is divided into autonomous levels not only appears to be methodologically undemonstrable but entails an unnecessarily unflattering model of man. It therefore has largely been abandoned by anthropologists.⁷⁵

The reification of culture has been criticized as mystical, a remnant of nineteenth century German romantic idealism.⁷⁶ Franz Boas, Kroeber's own teacher, who firmly believed in empiricism, criticized the superorganic, stating that "it hardly seems necessary to consider culture a mystic entity that exists outside the society of its individual carriers and moves by its own force."⁷⁷ Edward Sapir echoed Boas' criticism claiming that "it is not the concept of culture which is subtly misleading but the metaphysical locus to which culture is generally assigned."⁷⁸

Bidney and others have also attacked it as "metaphysical" and "as a kind of Fate which in the name of Social Science has superceded metaphysical Providence." More recent commentators refer to it as "animism," "mythology," as something that "can now be sustained by ideology and faith but not by sober science."⁷⁹ Geertz says that "the favorite image of the romantic ethnographers [is] a seamless superorganic unit within whose collective embrace the individual simply disappears into

⁷⁰ Brookfield, op. cit., footnote 1, p. 300. For a further discussion of the relationship between scale and explanation see L. Grossman, "Man-Environment Relationships in Anthropology and Geography," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 67 (1977), pp. 126-44; reference on p. 129. For an example of cultural geographers who appear to have abandoned the superorganic concept of culture and who have studied human behavior at the microscale, see Newton and Pulliam-Di Napoli, op. cit., footnote 3.

⁷¹ E. Sapir, "Sapir's Views of the Superorganic," in M. Freilich, ed., *The Meaning of Culture* (Lexington, Mass.: Xerox, 1972); reference on p. 82.

⁷² C. Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," in E. A. Hammel and W. S. Simmons, eds., *Man Makes Sense* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970), pp. 46-65; reference on p. 54.

⁷³ Geertz, op. cit., footnote 72, p. 51; M. E. Opler, "The Human Being in Culture Theory," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 66 (1964), pp. 507-28; reference on pp. 512, 521; R. M. Keesing, "Theories of Culture," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 3 (1974), pp. 73-97; reference on p. 74; J. D. Freeman, "Human Nature and Culture," in R. G. Slatyer et al., eds., *Man and the New Biology* (Contena: Australian National University Press, 1970), pp. 50-75.

⁷⁴ Opler, op. cit., footnote 73, p. 521.

⁷⁵ Geertz, op. cit., footnote 72, pp. 56-57; Voget, op. cit., footnote 22, p. 362; Keesing, op. cit., footnote 73, p. 74; and Voget, op. cit., footnote 18, pp. 545, 557, 797-800, 803.

⁷⁶ F. W. Voget, "The History of Cultural Anthropology," in J. J. Honigmann, ed., *Handbook of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973), pp. 1-88; reference on p. 3.

⁷⁷ F. Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life* (New York: Norton, 1928), p. 235.

⁷⁸ E. Sapir, *Cultural Anthropology and Psychiatry* (1932), quoted in F. Eggan, "Among the Anthropologists," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 3 (1974), pp. 1-19; reference on p. 4.

⁷⁹ D. Bidney, "On the Concept of Culture and Some Cultural Fallacies," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 46 (1944), pp. 30-44; reference on p. 41; D. Bidney, "Human Nature and the Cultural Process," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 49 (1947), pp. 375-99; reference on p. 384; Opler, op. cit., footnote 73, p. 524; G. P. Murdock, "Anthropology's Mythology," The Huxley Memorial Lecture, 1971, Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland for 1971, pp. 17-24; and Keesing, op. cit., footnote 73, p. 74.

a cloud of mystic harmony."⁸⁰ Given that the existence of the superorganic cannot be either proven or disproven then it simply becomes a matter of faith. Moreover it involves the rejection of the common sense belief in the importance of the actions of real, flesh and blood individuals.

Perhaps today in light of the admitted failure of positivist philosophers of science to sustain their goal of ridding science of all "metaphysics," defined somewhat inaccurately by them as that which is unobservable or untestable, one should not dismiss too casually the claim that culture may be a legitimate "theoretical entity" whose existence must be inferred because it cannot be observed.⁸¹ Although the anthropologists referred to above may not have been sufficiently careful in formulating their criticisms, they are essentially correct. There are many scientific theories whose links with empirical data are so loosely specified that they must be abandoned. In physical science, luminiferous ether is an example; in social science Durkheim's "collective conscience," Talcott Parsons' "pattern variables," and Kroeber's "culture" are examples of concepts that are impossible to link to empirical data either directly or indirectly in such a way as to demonstrate their existence as autonomous causal agents.⁸²

Based on the principle of parsimony, or Ockham's razor, a distinction that adds superfluous baggage to our body of concepts should be eliminated. The concept of autonomous levels appears to be an example of such an unnecessary concept. The reification of culture can be criticized, therefore, on the grounds that there is little empirical evidence to support even the inference of a transcendent, autonomous level. Positing such a level, while not providing any gain in analytic power, produces severe methodological problems.

Kroeber's attempt to substantiate his theory

with a series of empirical studies failed.⁸³ Whereas, he found recurrent trends in women's fashions over a three hundred year period he was unable to demonstrate that this pattern could be explained by the superorganic.⁸⁴ In his study, *The Configurations of Culture Growth* he drew together data from such varied societies as Mesopotamia, India, Japan, China, Greece, Rome, and Europe, showing that they had certain "common features in growth" of such cultural elements as sculpture, painting, drama, literature, philosophy, and science.⁸⁵ He tried to demonstrate that societies develop cultural configurations spasmodically and that such things as geniuses cluster during certain periods of culture growth. However Kroeber failed to demonstrate a uniformity in the patterns which would have added weight to his notion of the superorganic. He was forced to admit that:⁸⁶

in reviewing the ground covered, I wish to say at the outset that I see no evidence of any true law in the phenomena dealt with: nothing cyclical, regularly repetitive or necessary.

Another prominent exponent of the superorganic, Leslie White, was also unable to apply the theory in his empirical work. As Wolf points out he used his notion of culture as superorganic only in his programmatic statements. His substantive research consisted of careful descriptions of Indian tribes of the Southwest.⁸⁷ His theory was never brought to bear upon his empirical work because his notion of culture is nonoperational. This serious shortcoming might be overlooked if the culture concept were shown to have sufficient analytic power to justify the otherwise unwarranted assumptions contained in the theory.

The superorganic implies a view of man as relatively passive and impotent. If the individual is considered atomistic and isolated then the binding forces between men must be external to them. The superorganicists fail to re-

⁸⁰ C. Geertz, *The Social History of an Indonesian Town* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1965), p. 145.

⁸¹ G. Maxwell, "The Ontological Status of Theoretical Entities," in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 3-27; M. Hesse, "Laws and Theories," in P. Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3 (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 404-10.

⁸² A. Ryan, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (London: MacMillan Press, 1970), p. 87.

⁸³ R. Bohannon and M. Glazer, eds., *Highpoints in Anthropology* (New York: Knopf, 1973), p. 106.

⁸⁴ Kroeber, op. cit., footnote 25, pp. 262-63; A. L. Kroeber and J. Richardson, "Three Centuries of Women's Dress Fashions: A Quantitative Analysis," *University of California Anthropological Records*, Berkeley, Vol. 5 (1940), pp. 111-54; and Opler, op. cit., footnote 73, pp. 513-16.

⁸⁵ A. L. Kroeber, *The Configurations of Culture Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944).

⁸⁶ Kroeber, op. cit., footnote 85, p. 761.

⁸⁷ Wolf, op. cit., footnote 28, pp. 61-62.

alize that "culture is the work of humanity; we have the impression that it is autonomous only because it is anonymous."⁸⁸

To be sure, it is very common to find unforeseen effects of action, consequences that are at times in direct contradiction to the intentions of any given individual who may have been instrumental in bringing them about. However as Joachim Israel has said:⁸⁹

the existence of such autonomous effects does not imply the existence of "objective," in the sense of thing-like, non-human factors operating independently of human action. They imply only a lack of human foresight, intelligence and motivation.

To the extent that cultural geographers take culture to be a determining force, other types of explanation do not appear necessary. Hence many important questions are precluded. We find little or no attempt to find empirical evidence of the processes by which cultural patterns are generated. As Freilich has argued "by focusing on culture as a superorganic process it is not necessary to deal with the complexities of human decision-making. The human animal received a culture, saw reality through his culture's 'eyes' and acted accordingly."⁹⁰ Individuals making choices, interacting, negotiating, imposing constraints on one another are, then, largely ignored. When institutions are seen as the products of culture, the fact that they are the outcome of social interaction and often represent the interests of certain groups as opposed to others is often forgotten.

The most serious consequence of attributing causal power to culture is the fact that it obscures many important issues as to the origin, transmittal, and differentiation within a population of various "cultural characteristics." There is a surprising lack of many kinds of explanatory variables that are employed in other subfields of geography and in other social sciences; for example there is little or no discussion of social stratification, the political interests of particular groups, and the conflicts which arise from their opposing interests. Similarly there is little discussion of government and other institutional policies, or the

effects of business organizations and financial institutions on the landscape. Many of these things are seen as "given," as cultural characteristics of a people that are not analyzed in any detail or used in explanation. Culture, which presumably includes the factors mentioned above, is seen to produce such effects on landscape. Thus the interactions of men or institutions often are not given careful attention. It should be noted however that Wagner points to this lack and suggests that cultural geographers in the future direct their studies to the institutions within which behavior takes place.⁹¹ In short the world described by the cultural geographers is a world in which the individual is largely absent, consensus prevails, deviance is ignored; it is a world untouched by intracultural conflict. Thus the unintended consequence of the superorganic theory has been to discourage inquiry into important questions of social interaction by rooting explanation in a transcendental realm.

The Internalization of Culture

Under the rule of the superorganic typical values or norms are posited as the mechanism by which a transcendental object becomes translated into a form that can be internalized by individuals. These values reveal what Kroeber and Benedict have referred to as the "patterns of a given culture." For Kroeber culture became anchored in unconscious patterning.⁹² A number of geographers have adopted this "patterning" assumption. Spencer writes that "the patternings of culture . . . create group norms, styles, or configurations."⁹³ Thomas uses a variety of terms for such patterns; these are "configuration," "dominant drives," "destiny idea," "genius of a culture," and "cultural theme."⁹⁴ The term "configuration" is preferred by Zelinsky who states:⁹⁵

Most of the norms, limits, or possibilities of human action thus are set as much or more by the configura-

⁸⁸ P. L. Wagner, "The Themes of Cultural Geography Rethought," *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers*, Vol. 37 (1975), pp. 7-14; reference on pp. 12-13.

⁸⁹ Voget, op. cit., footnote 76, p. 32.

⁹⁰ Spencer, op. cit., footnote 53, p. 63.

⁹¹ W. L. Thomas, *Land, Man and Culture in Mainland South East Asia* (Glen Rock, New Jersey: privately published, 1957), p. 56.

⁹² Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 71.

⁸⁸ Opler, op. cit., footnote 73, p. 525.

⁸⁹ J. Israel, *Alienation from Marx to Modern Sociology: A Macro-Sociological Analysis* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), p. 331.

⁹⁰ M. Freilich, *The Meaning of Culture* (Lexington, Mass.: Xerox College Publishing, 1972), pp. 81-82.

tion of the culture as by biological endowment or the nature of the physical habitat.

Although a number of cultural geographers have stressed the role of cultural values or configurations in shaping behavior, the geographer who has devoted the most attention to these is Zelinsky.⁹⁶ The American configuration in which Zelinsky is interested comprises four principal "themes" or "values" that he has identified. These themes are: "(1) an intense, almost anarchistic individualism, (2) a high valuation placed upon mobility and change, (3) a mechanistic vision of the world, and (4) a messianic perfectionism."⁹⁷ Zelinsky argues, following the usage of Kroeber, Kluckhohn, and Talcott Parsons, that these values become internalized and cause people to behave in certain distinct ways. It is in this manner that culture produces behavior. As an example he states that the theme of mobility and change has produced jazz music.⁹⁸

The internalization of the values creates, Zelinsky claims, a modal personality type which can also be termed a "national character." The mechanistic world vision, Zelinsky believes, accounts for Americans favoring "efficiency," "cleanliness," and "bigness," as well as their "strongly extroverted personality pattern."⁹⁹ He goes even further, claim-

ing that this value pattern turns people into machine-like entities that need to be maintained as real machines:¹⁰⁰

The pressures within the cultural milieu tend to mold people into flexible, adjustable, cheerful, conformable units for operation in the social as well as the economic sphere. If a machine is to work well, its parts must be washed, dusted and carefully cleaned and polished; and for this reason, among others, we find an obsessional interest in personal cleanliness.

Zelinsky's book *The Cultural Geography of the United States* contains many references to "the cultural personality and behavior of American man," the "American cultural psyche," and "the American cultural soul."¹⁰¹ In a similar vein, Sauer makes use of regional character types in "The Personality of Mexico." He identifies two modal character types in Mexico. In the north, he claims, men are "born to take risks"; whereas in the South the people's character predisposes them to "patient, steady toil."¹⁰²

The use of such ideal-type norms, values, or modal personality types may be questioned. There are two issues at stake. One concerns the usefulness of extremely broad generalizations such as the "American cultural psyche" or the personality of Northern Mexico for descriptive purposes. This issue is not clear-cut since it involves matters of scale and it depends upon the purposes of the individual using such descriptive generalizations.

Sauer's use of the modal personality type should be questioned only because of its extreme generality. One can rightly ask if there is any value in attempts to reduce the char-

⁹⁶ H. H. Aschmann, "Can Cultural Geography be Taught?," in *Introductory Geography: Viewpoints and Themes*, Commission on College Geography, Publication No. 5. (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Geographers, 1967), pp. 65-74; reference on p. 73; E. T. Price, "Cultural Geography," in D. L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 6 (New York: MacMillan, 1968), pp. 129-34; reference on p. 133; and Thomas, op. cit., footnote 94, pp. 147, 151.

⁹⁷ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 40. In an article written in 1974, Zelinsky echoes the cultural determinist Durkheim worrying that perhaps the theme of anarchistic individualism is coming to dominate behavior in the United States. He therefore suggests that we add the "personality factor" to the "laws of economic behavior," "constraints of . . . [the] physical environment," and "laws of socio-cultural behavior." He retains the structure of his superorganic argument by viewing this personality factor as "newly emergent social-psychological forces," (pp. 144-45) and by stating that "a hitherto uncharted, multidimensional domain of geographic phenomena can be detected hovering over the surface of the United States: the world of virtually unconstrained personal impulse" (p. 175). See W. Zelinsky, "Selfward Bound? Personal Preference Patterns and the Changing Map of American Society," *Economic Geography*, Vol. 50 (1974), pp. 144-79.

⁹⁸ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 53.

⁹⁹ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 59.

¹⁰⁰ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 59.

¹⁰¹ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, pp. 5, 53, 63.

¹⁰² C. O. Sauer, "The Personality of Mexico," in J. Leighly, ed., *Land and Life: A Selection From the Writings of Carl Sauer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 104-17; reference on p. 117. The notion of modal personality type is also supported by Andrew Clark who writes "The things that one reasonably may say about a country's cultural identity or national character have been discussed by many scholars, and brilliantly so for the United States by Wilbur Zelinsky in . . . *Cultural Geography of the United States*." A. Clark, "The Whole is Greater than the Sum of its Parts: A Humanistic Element in Human Geography," in D. R. Deskins, G. Kish, J. D. Nystuen, G. Olsson, eds., *Geographic Humanism, Analysis, and Social Action*, Proceedings of Symposia Celebrating a Half Century of Geography at Michigan (Ann Arbor: Michigan Geographical Publications, No. 17, 1977), pp. 3-26; reference on p. 25.

acter of millions of people to a few traits. Furthermore, Sauer gives no evidence that any significant proportion of the population of northern Mexico are "born to take risks." Some anthropologists have raised questions as to the "scientific precision of specific characterizations and the methods of attaining them." Charges have also been made that such an approach is characterized by unnecessary selectivity and neglect of inconsistent data in cases in which they are pertinent to the problem at hand.¹⁰³ The learning environments of individuals in all but the smallest and most primitive societies often differ radically from one another.¹⁰⁴ What proportion of Americans is represented by Zelinsky's four themes? Do they apply equally to the members of all ethnic groups and income levels? How have those who are not represented escaped the cultural press? Perhaps of greater importance is the fact that the question of how values arise and are maintained is rendered unproblematic by this deterministic mode of explanation. Geertz characterizes it as "a mode, an archetype, a Platonic idea or an Aristotelian form with respect to which actual men . . . are but reflections, distortions, approximations."¹⁰⁵ Such an approach Geertz claims, leads to a drowning of living detail in dead stereotypes and ultimately obscures more than it reveals.¹⁰⁶

The second issue deals with the role of ideal types in explanation. Although controversial, this is a more clear-cut issue. Ideal types may be used in explanations as models or heuristic devices, in other words as instruments in explanation. There is a tendency, however, and Zelinsky's writing illustrates this nicely, to forget that these are mental constructs of the social scientist, that they are abstractions from reality and as such should not be interpreted realistically, i.e. as real things that exist in the world and cause events or that can be the subject of empirical laws.¹⁰⁷ An ideal type

is a model and as such may be suggestive of hypotheses or can aid in explanation by analogy. It must be judged, however, by its usefulness, as in an instrumentalist approach, and not by its truthfulness in explanation as would be the case in a realist argument.¹⁰⁸

Zelinsky's use of ideal-types and configurations of culture in causal explanations is clearly unacceptable because it involves treating an instrumental concept in a realist fashion. Zelinsky claims that ideal-typical traits such as a "mechanistic world-vision" are things with causal efficacy, not simply useful mental constructs. For example he suggests that this mechanistic vision causes people to be efficient, clean, and extroverted. The facticity claimed for the ideal types and the role these are said to play in translating the superorganic into behavior on the part of people who are essentially passive agents of culture is far more objectionable than the mere use of a few ideal-type characteristics to describe a whole nation of people. The latter can only be criticized as being of questionable utility, while the interpretation of ideal-typical patterns as transcendent, autonomous things which cause people to behave in some specified fashion is an obvious case of misusing ideal-types.

Zelinsky shares with the cultural personalist school of anthropology in making the mistake of taking ideal-typical values and norms presumably derived from casual observation of behavior of certain groups within the culture, and using these to explain behavior. By making an ideal-type out of empirical observations and then using these to explain similar observations one produces a tautology. It is both circular and a gross form of reification, certainly a misuse of ideal-types.

The Homogeneity Assumption

Underlying much of the work of the cultural geographers is an assumption of homogeneity within a culture. Cultural geographers have often chosen to do research in relatively primitive rural areas in order to discern greater homogeneity. Most of Sauer's work was in rural regions of Mexico, or back in the "farthest

¹⁰³ A. R. Lindesmith and A. L. Strauss, "A Critique of Culture—Personality Writing," in M. Fried, ed., *Readings in Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Crowell, 1959), pp. 528–45; reference on p. 531.

¹⁰⁴ A. F. C. Wallace, "Individual Differences and Cultural Uniformities," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 17 (1952), pp. 747–50; reference on pp. 748–49.

¹⁰⁵ Geertz, op. cit., footnote 72, p. 62.

¹⁰⁶ Geertz, op. cit., footnote 72, p. 62–63.

¹⁰⁷ Dennis Wrong, *Max Weber* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 154.

¹⁰⁸ John Agnew, personal communications. Also for the distinction between instrumentalism and realism see R. Keat and J. Urry, *Social Theory as Science* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975); and M. Hesse, op. cit., footnote 81.

reaches of human time" so that an assumption of homogeneity could reasonably be made, or had to be made due to a paucity of data. Similarly, Wagner's study of *Nicoya* and Mikesell's study of *Northern Morocco* were of rural areas.¹⁰⁹ Aschmann suggests that in order to teach students about cultural geography in the field it is best to choose a primitive and isolated area to study.¹¹⁰

A few cultural geographers who have studied complex societies such as the United States also assume homogeneity. Zelinsky claims that there exists a "unified national culture" and that a "surprising degree of relative uniformity among the various regions and social segments of the country" exists.¹¹¹

In the past many cultural anthropologists have also assumed homogeneity and have been criticized for doing so. Detractors of this position claim that even in primitive societies less homogeneity exists than many would have us believe.¹¹² Wallace asserts that the idea of uniform behavior is implicit in the concept of culture.¹¹³ Bennett claims that this view arose because culture was identified with a "holistic, tribal unity which was then assumed to be present among all human groups."¹¹⁴ During the 1930s it was this view of homogeneous behavior within an integrated culture that led anthropologists to conceive of change as infrequent and consisting of forces external to culture. During this time, therefore, diffusion enjoyed great popularity as an explanation of change, and internal conflicts of interest were downplayed.¹¹⁵

Wagner has recently raised the issue in regard to the work of the cultural geographers:¹¹⁶

If vagueness and obscurity are faults in culture history, I maintain that they can still plague contemporary cultural studies, too. Our subjects most commonly are either individuals presumed to think and behave virtually the same, as in the blessed small community, or peoples or nations similarly seen as homogeneous. At best, we get our personality and character, served up by regions like the "South". . . . Aggregating mightily, one can speak of national cultures. The chief attribute of such a broad concept is its uselessness.

He goes on to suggest that cultural geographers abandon their homogeneity assumption and focus their attention on the scale of the institution, which, he claims is the critical level in complex, modern societies. He ends his article by stating that "the time for crude aggregation of data is past." He suggests that geographers must move away from this "less sophisticated mechanistic and aggregative thinking."¹¹⁷ When culture is defined as the active force and the individual the passive recipient, homogeneity will be assumed, for individuals must be blank pages upon which the culture pattern is imprinted. Therefore an attack on the homogeneity assumption hits at the heart of the superorganic theory of culture.

Habituation: Mechanism for the Internalization of Culture

The final major assumption associated with the superorganic concept of culture is Pavlovian conditioning. This was posited by early twentieth century anthropologists as the mechanism by which cultural values become internalized by individuals. This view was adopted either consciously or, more likely, unknowingly by cultural geographers who most often refer to it as habitual behavior.

According to Wax, "the tragic flaw in [Boas'] approach to cultural anthropology was that he operated with a simple-minded mechanical psychology."¹¹⁸ In the chapter entitled "Stability of Culture" in his *Anthropology and Modern Life* Boas stressed that men's actions could be largely explained by habit that stemmed from conditioning early in life.¹¹⁹ He adopted the behaviorist claim that habit should be construed not as thought but

¹⁰⁹ P. L. Wagner, *Nicoya: A Cultural Geography* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in Geography), Vol. 12 (1958), pp. 195-250; and M. W. Mikesell, *Northern Morocco: A Cultural Geography* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in Geography), Vol. 14 (1961).

¹¹⁰ Aschmann, op. cit., footnote 96, p. 70.

¹¹¹ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, pp. 7, 40.

¹¹² J. W. Bennett, "Interdisciplinary Research and the Concept of Culture," in M. Freilich, ed., *The Meaning of Culture* (Lexington, Mass.: Xerox College Publishing, 1972), pp. 226-38; reference on p. 229; D. Mandelbaum, "Cultural Anthropology," in D. L. Sills, ed., *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan, 1968), pp. 313-19; reference on p. 316.

¹¹³ Wallace, op. cit., footnote 104, p. 747.

¹¹⁴ Bennett, op. cit., footnote 112, p. 229.

¹¹⁵ Bennett, op. cit., footnote 112, p. 229.

¹¹⁶ Wagner, op. cit., footnote 91, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ Wagner, op. cit., footnote 91, p. 14.

¹¹⁸ M. Wax, "The Anthropology of Boas," in M. Freilich, ed., *The Meaning of Culture* (Lexington, Mass.: Xerox College Publishing, 1972), pp. 22-31; reference on p. 28.

¹¹⁹ Boas, op. cit., footnote 77.

as activity. Thought concerning habitual activity was usually seen as after-the-fact rationalization. Boas' perspective was passed on to his students Lowie and Kroeber so that as Voget points out:¹²⁰

The new cultural-historical determinists relied on Behaviorism to supply the psychological under-pinning of man-in-culture processes. The evidences of conditioning presented by Pavlov were accepted casually as quite congruent with the cultural process, whereas Freudian interpretations that called attention to the reactions of individuals to cultural processes generally were vigorously opposed or ignored.

During the first half of the twentieth century then, a view of culture as based upon unconscious patterning which molded the motivations of individuals was widespread.¹²¹ Stress was placed upon the dominance of motor habits over intellectual processes and an individual's emotional attachment to tradition was asserted.¹²² Man was viewed not as a deliberative actor but as a being moved by "affect states."¹²³ Sauer's presidential address to the Association of American Geographers in 1941 was a statement of his position on cultural geography. He referred to habit as synonymous with culture, stating "we may redefine the old definition of man's relation to this environment as the relation of habit to habitat."¹²⁴ Many others have also adopted the notion of culture as habitual behavior stressing the fact that this habitual behavior is learned. Sauer states that "culture is the learned and conventionalized activity of a group that occupies an area."¹²⁵ Elsewhere Sauer, Wagner and Mikesell, Wagner, and Zelinsky define culture as learned habitual behavior and state their definition in much the same terms.¹²⁶

Whereas the notion of cultural conditioning is implicit in the work of those cultural geographers who accept the notion of the primacy of habitual action, some geographers have been quite explicit in their adoption of conditioning theory. Zelinsky, for example, refers

us to Kroeber and Kluckhohn's definition of culture as the "conditioning elements" of action.¹²⁷ He then goes on to tell us that "Each cultural group has a certain common fund of traits . . . that is acquired, usually quite unconsciously, during the early months and years of childhood."¹²⁸ He continues with the assertion that Americans are "conditioned to accepting individualism," that they are characterized by "sheep-like conformity," that they have "ideas, usually subconscious, as to a proper way to construct a dwelling," which "reflect the primordial notions of house morphology."¹²⁹ We are further told that New Englanders have a "cultural predisposition against personal violence" and finally that culture formation is largely:¹³⁰

transacted at the unlit subterranean levels of consciousness, as a series of extremely gradual, subtle shifts in modes of thinking, feeling, and impulse in response to basic alterations in socioeconomic structure and ecological patterns.

As we have seen, Zelinsky's use of cultural conditioning parallels that of the superorganicists in anthropology with his stress upon learned habitual action on the one hand and the unconscious on the other.

As some cultural geographers have turned their attention to countries such as the United States, the assumption that there are uniform habitual behavior patterns for all the inhabitants has become clearly untenable. Attention, therefore, is paid to roles. In his notes on a seminar offered by Sauer in 1963, Newcomb quotes Sauer as saying, "In a complex super-culture, we observe the different roles and statuses."¹³¹ The notion of role allows one to conceive of action in terms of habitual behavior in a highly segmented society. One can by this method transfer the homogeneity and habitual action presuppositions regarding a simple society to a complex one. In role theory, the notion that people behave according to the dictates of their culture is refined in such a way that their behavior, rather than being prescribed by a culture as a whole is prescribed by their role within it. There is little difference between these perspectives be-

¹²⁰ Voget, op. cit., footnote 22, p. 351.

¹²¹ Voget, op. cit., footnote 76, pp. 32, 38-39.

¹²² Wax, op. cit., footnote 118, p. 32.

¹²³ Voget, op. cit., footnote 22, p. 354.

¹²⁴ Sauer, op. cit., footnote 54, p. 359.

¹²⁵ Sauer, op. cit., footnote 54, p. 359.

¹²⁶ Wagner and Mikesell, op. cit., footnote 5, p. 2; C. O. Sauer, *Agricultural Origins and Dispersals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952); Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 49, p. 75; and P. L. Wagner, *Environment and Peoples* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 5.

¹²⁷ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 70.

¹²⁸ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, p. 72.

¹²⁹ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, pp. 42, 44, 89.

¹³⁰ Zelinsky, op. cit., footnote 48, pp. 103, 68.

¹³¹ R. M. Newcomb, "Carl O. Sauer, Teacher," *Historical Geography Newsletter*, Vol. 6 (1976), pp. 21-30; reference on p. 25.

cause both draw upon culture as the overarching transcendental object and on conditioning theory. They are close, in this respect at least, to the structural-functional sociology of Talcott Parsons. For the superorganicist man is normally an uninventive creature. Commonly his creativity is seen as confined to the initial creation of culture, thereafter his behavior can be largely explained by habitual conditioning.

The picture of man as an object acted upon and conditioned by an external force is based upon what Wrong has termed an "oversocialized conception of man."¹³² Unselfconscious, habitual action is but one aspect of human behavior another aspect of which is individual choice and creativity. This choice is not entirely unconstrained, however. It is constrained not by mysterious suprahuman forces but by specifiable economic and social conditions. These conditions are not autonomous but analyzable into individual and group activity. These constraints should be viewed as problematic, i.e. should be investigated in research. Cultural anthropologists and cultural geographers have tended to vastly overplay conditioned behavior thus producing what has been criticized as an impoverished view of man. Kroeber's superorganic theory has been labeled by Bidney as antihumanist while Freilich implies the same when he states that Kroeber considers culture as if man did not exist.¹³³ R. Wagner argues that reified anthropological models such as these accomplish "the metamorphization of life into culture" thereby short-circuiting the creative potentiality of meaning and impoverishing social experience.¹³⁴ Jacques Ellul condemns the antihumanism in such structural models which "nominally retain . . . [man] while reducing him to a system and an interplay of forces."¹³⁵

¹³² D. H. Wrong, "The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 26 (1961), pp. 183-93. Wrong's critique was of the model of man employed by Talcott Parsons, but it can equally serve for Kroeber, for as Parsons and Kroeber themselves point out in a coauthored article, their model of man is identical; op. cit., footnote 20. Bidney levels the same charges at Kroeber. See Bidney, op. cit., footnote 79, "Cultural Fallacies," p. 35.

¹³³ Bidney, op. cit., footnote 79, "Cultural Fallacies," p. 31; and Freilich, op. cit., footnote 90.

¹³⁴ R. Wagner, *The Invention of Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1975), p. 28.

¹³⁵ J. Ellul, "Problems of Sociological Method," *Social Research*, Vol. 43 (1976), pp. 6-24; reference on p. 9.

TOWARDS A NONREIFIED CONCEPT OF CULTURE

After about 1940 a growing consensus developed within American cultural anthropology that individuals were not simply conditioned automatons.¹³⁶ Rather, as Keesing points out, attention was shifted to the question of how individuals, interacting with other individuals through institutions, create, maintain, and are in turn modified by their environment.¹³⁷ Stress was increasingly placed upon how individuals exercise choice, how they are strategists who manipulate the contexts in which they find themselves.¹³⁸ This is a very different conception of man, emphasizing consciousness, self-interest, differential values and expectations, and the role of individuals in the process of change.¹³⁹

A number of anthropologists have recently called for an approach to understanding the relation between culture and the individual in which culture constitutes a context for, rather than a determinant of, choices. Attention is focused on both freedom and constraint, conscious as well as unconscious behavior, and the conscious manipulation of some individuals' unquestioned beliefs by others.¹⁴⁰ One could say that people allow cultural prescriptions to dictate their behavior because they see these as abstractions not because they really are autonomous.¹⁴¹ For example, in the

¹³⁶ Voget, op. cit., footnote 22, p. 356.

¹³⁷ Keesing, op. cit., footnote 73, p. 91.

¹³⁸ Wallace, op. cit., footnote 104, p. 748; and Voget, op. cit., footnote 18, pp. 546, 799.

¹³⁹ Voget, op. cit., footnote 18, p. 561; Voget, op. cit., footnote 22, p. 357; C. Erasmus, *Man Takes Control: Cultural Development and American Aid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 309; and S. Diamond, "What History is," in R. A. Manners, ed., *Process and Pattern in Culture* (Chicago: Aldine, 1964), pp. 29-46; reference on p. 33.

¹⁴⁰ Voget, op. cit., footnote 22, pp. 356-57; Voget, op. cit., footnote 18, pp. 562, 800, 802-04; Geertz, op. cit., footnote 72, pp. 57, 63; Keesing, op. cit., footnote 73, p. 91; Opler, op. cit., footnote 73, pp. 524-25; and F. Barth, "On the Study of Culture Change," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 69 (1967), pp. 661-69; reference on pp. 661-63.

¹⁴¹ Weber, warning against the dangers of reification, insisted that it must not be forgotten that collectivities are "solely the resultants and modes of organization of the specific acts of individual men." However, he goes on to say that reification is important from the subjective standpoint of individual actors in that it plays an important "causal" role in social behavior. See A. Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge

case of one of Zelinsky's "four themes," individualism may have an impact on the behavior of Americans not because it is part of any mechanism by which a superorganic culture determines behavior but because many Americans believe that individualism is an American characteristic and they therefore act in accordance with this belief.¹⁴²

That which has been termed "culture" can be reduced to the interaction between people. An individual's interactions with others shapes the nature of his self. The individual is thus in part a product of this context as well as a producer and sustainer of the context. This is simply to say that whereas children, for example, are socialized by their parents, school teachers, and friends into accepting a set of values, which they can in turn pass on to their children, many children as they grow up and are exposed to other ideas, can and often do reject the ideas that were conveyed to them as children. In other words individuals are more autonomous than the thoroughly socialized individual posited by the cultural geographers. Within the limits of social and institutional constraints the individual picks and chooses from the multitude of choices provided by the many social worlds with which he is familiar.

The term culture could be saved if it were not treated as an explanatory variable in itself but used to signify contexts for action or sets of arrangements between people at various levels of aggregation. These may in fact appear as things-in-themselves and thus provide the "taken-for-granted" nature of the world. In any society there is not a single context but a series of contexts at a variety of scales. Different individuals and groups, depending upon how much access to power and other resources they have, are differentially able to arrange and modify these different contexts. Some have an impact upon the immediate context of their neighborhood whereas the rich and the powerful may leave their mark at the national scale.¹⁴³ These contexts often have

their origins in the distant past, making them seem remote to the people who now accept them, often unquestioningly, as guidelines for action. This is not evidence for the autonomy of large scale processes, however; it merely reflects the opaqueness of complicated interactions and man's alienation from his collective creations. As Clifford Geertz, perhaps the best known spokesman for this new view of culture writes, culture is not:¹⁴⁴

a power, something to which social events, behavior, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligently . . . described.

It might be suggested that culture rather than being viewed as a powerful autonomous force should be considered as a set of traditions and beliefs that may guide action especially when they are defined by the actors themselves as "natural" or "correct" modes of behavior. Attention should be placed upon the complex interactions, which may be more or less organized or formalized, between individuals and groups that produce these guidelines for behavior within a certain cultural context.

CONCLUSION

In summary, one can categorize the various mistakes associated with the use of the superorganic theory of culture as either ontological or empirical in nature. I have claimed that the separation of the individual from culture is an ontological mistake. It is a case of anthropomorphism, of reifying a mental construct and attributing to it self-direction and power over men that is purely fictitious. Furthermore it involves rejecting common sense modes of thinking without gaining analytic power. The assumption of homogeneity within a culture is an empirical generalization which does not appear to be justifiable in terms of furthering theoretical progress. The use of the generic man and modal personality types as causal mechanisms again is a case of reification. A greater problem lies in the fact that they preclude important research questions. Further, Pavlovian conditioning theory has been inadequate in explaining empirical research data. Perhaps more telling than these specific criticisms is

University Press, 1971), pp. 150-51; and Berger and Pullberg, op. cit., footnote 2.

¹⁴² This is a realist view of reification. See "Reification and Realism," in Keat and Urry, op. cit., footnote 108, pp. 176-95.

¹⁴³ M. Samuels, "The Biography of Landscape," in D. W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

¹⁴⁴ C. Geertz "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-30; reference on p. 14.

the fact that the general approach to culture has been adopted uncritically, which is to say that with few exceptions cultural geographers appear unconcerned by controversies in anthropology over this theory. It could be added that this failure to defend the use of outmoded theory is widespread and not confined to cultural geography.

A major question remains, what value, if any, does the notion of culture have for geography? The present critique does not deny that there is value in the use of the term culture; it does however reject the attribution of autonomous ontological status to the concept. It suggests that culture defined as a superorganic entity is not only unconvincing as an explanatory variable, but impedes explanation by masking many problematic social, economic, and political relationships.

The criticisms of the superorganic apply to substantive work in cultural geography as well as the programmatic statements. Much of Sauer's empirical research may deserve the attention and praise it has received, however as a school "Sauerian" or Berkeley cultural geography is unnecessarily limited in the range of questions it can address and more importantly in the range of explanatory variables with which it can deal. By explicitly ruling out discussion of individuals and by dealing only with the material effect of man in general, generic man, or the aggregation of all men in a region, one is left with but two choices. Either, one can deny explanation as a goal and settle for "description" which is somehow distinguished from explanation, or, one must depend upon a larger whole such as culture as an explanatory variable. However the distinction between explanation and description is by no means clear. On the one hand, as Sauer rightly claimed, historical description can be explanation. On the other hand, a mere sequence of events is not necessarily explanation especially when the most important factors are omitted. By denying individual action as a legitimate concern of geographers, one must either reify man by making him into an ideal (i.e. generic man), reify culture, or deny explanation as a goal.

Can the concept of culture be saved? Not all cultural geographers consistently treat culture as a superorganic entity. It is often used as a catch-all term to mean the way of life of a people. This in itself may not cause any problem. Any attempt to save culture as an explanatory concept by defining it in this way, even if divested of an independent ontological status, fails. It is tautological to explain anything about a group of people by reference to a notion which allegedly covers all the characteristics of the group including, by definition, that which is to be explained. Such a definition of culture can be of use only in categorizing behavior at a very broad comparative scale across "world cultures." This, however, may involve the problems mentioned above in connection with ideal national types.

The rejection of a reified notion of culture may imply a degree of convergence between cultural and social geography. If culture is no longer viewed as an autonomous object requiring a self-contained level of inquiry but rather as the context for social interaction, then the distinction between social and cultural geography collapses. Rather than studying a "thing" called culture, research would be focused on individuals and groups as they interact with their physical environment in various social and institutional contexts at a variety of scales. The emphasis on social, psychological, and occasionally political explanation found in social geography nicely complements the landscape, artifactual, and aesthetic emphases of cultural geography. The man-land tradition although strong in cultural geography is weak in social geography today because of the central concern with spatial aspects of urban problems. A merging of these two subareas of geography would be mutually beneficial if the cultural geographers' traditional definition of geography as the study of the relation between "man" and the environment were to be given greater emphasis in social geography. "Man," of course, in this case is not the disembodied generic man of orthodox cultural geography but individuals and groups of individuals in relation to particular socio-historical landscapes.