

Antiguans sometimes call 'making noise.' It is the significance of these which I wish to examine. 'To make noise' may refer to the assertion of oneself by the sound of one's voice, as in the quotations from Lamming. Such 'noise' is involved in a set of conventions which pattern what, following Hymes (1967), we may call channel functioning: who speaks when to whom, who is heard when by whom, etc. The phrase also refers to three genres: boasting, cursing, and argument, whose form and uses are distinctive. And finally these conventions and genres collectively act to create certain speech events of a striking kind that, following the musical analogy inherent in the word 'noise,' I want to call contrapuntal — in the sense that, as we shall see, each voice has a 'tune' and maintains it and that the voices often sing independently at the same time.

There are problems involved in the structural notions required to deal with shared meanings at such different levels of patterning. What Hymes has called 'linguistic routines': 'sequential organizations beyond the sentence, either as activities of one person, or as the interaction of two or more' (MS.), are fairly broadly, but also loosely, conceived. How formally structured must speech be to qualify as a routine? Some parts of conversations, particularly openings and closings, may be quite strictly structured, while other parts may be more open. There are routines, such as sermons, quite sharply defined by the institutional framework in which they normally occur: changes in sermon style in the seventeenth century — and now too — being a source or at least a concomitant of considerable institutional turmoil. Other kinds of routines, particularly those involving more than one speaker, seem to emerge out of the hubbub of ordinary speech by principles that are not too clear. Some good work is now being done starting from the vocabulary of routines and occasions, and relating behavior to the classifications of this vocabulary. But some societies are more explicit in their use of terminology than others. For a number of reasons the West Indies is exceptionally difficult in this regard, both in a desire to avoid explicitness, and to keep from explicit awareness patterns that may deviate from accepted European usage.

Speech routines are forms of *expression*, having living ties with the people who use them. Descriptions of such routines in terms of explicit formal models, whether of sequential organization or variations of transformational models, while worthwhile, often seem to take us further away from rather than closer to revelations of their functions and meaning. Such descriptions have been less effective than similar abstractions of linguistic competence, for it is harder to separate the formal structure of symbols more closely involved with expression from the variety of broader factors (including performance factors) which may contribute to meaning.¹

The main body of everyday speech is an area often felt to be structurally

CONTRAPUNTAL CONVERSATIONS IN AN ANTIGUAN VILLAGE

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The conventions which order speech interaction are meaningful not only in that they order and mediate verbal expression, but in that they participate in and express larger meanings in the society which uses them. This paper attempts a look at a particular structure of conventions and associated meanings in Antigua, West Indies.

George Lamming, the West Indian writer, opens his book *The Pleasures of Exile* with a quotation from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* — a play which he discusses at length in the book as a symbol of the cultural relations of the metropolitan countries with their Caribbean colonies:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and
hurt not.

The word 'noise' has unfamiliar meanings here — and the ambiguities that result may serve us, as I feel they often do West Indians, to characterize and to symbolize both the structure and the ambivalent value of certain central patterns of West Indian speech.

Lamming himself is aware of these ambiguities. Of a West Indian politician in England he remarks, 'He would shout his replies when the devil's disciples came to heckle. And that is as it should be; for there is no voice which can make more noise in argument than the West Indian voice' (1960:91). And of himself, 'So I made a heaven of a noise which is characteristic of my voice and an ingredient of West Indian behaviour' (1960:62).

The Elizabethans, too, were ambivalent about the word — as evidenced by the present meaning it has for us. In one sense a 'noise' was a band of musicians; in another it was 'an agreeable or melodious sound' — each instrument made its noise — and yet in a third sense a 'noise' was a 'quarrel.' (It is not completely irrelevant that, as with personal names, Elizabethan and seventeenth-century senses of words play a significant role in English-based creoles.)

On the island of Antigua there are a variety of ways of speaking that

open. In fact how 'creative' (in this sense) the genres of everyday speaking are may vary and/or be a matter of debate (as to some extent the degree and kind of 'newness' of sentences is, or should be, in linguistics). But between the formulas of prayers and greetings and such totally innovative use of language as may exist there is the large range of speech patterned to communicate meanings: about feelings, status, cultural identity, personality, skills, etc.; about the significance of different types of communicative acts; and about the meanings of expression and communication themselves. In these areas creative choices of means of expression must be made by speakers.

Consider for example the relations between speech and silence. Many Americans (and many English people) have a rule that in social conversation silences must be filled. A silence maintained too long is a sign of some kind of failure of rapport (unless it is defined as somehow seeking the solution to a problem, etc.). In Denmark by contrast there is a tendency, particularly in small informal groups, to treat silences as valuable signs — perhaps of the well-being of those present, at least a kind of affirmation that people speak only when moved to do so, that their feelings are genuine, etc. Some Danes appear to 'nourish' a silence as one might appreciate a cozy fire. These norms can be quite strong. I used to have some Danish in-laws and once while we were visiting them an American friend announced that he was arriving for a visit. We welcomed him, but as we knew he was particularly prone to filling gaps in conversations we suggested quite strongly and explicitly that he let silences sit for awhile before talking. Although the rule is quite simple, it is usually quite difficult for people to change their cues, habits, or what have you in these matters. My in-laws had been quite glad to see him. No disagreements of any kind arose between them, yet by the end of the first evening these kindly Danes could stand his presence no longer — simply because an evening without silence was emotionally intolerable.

There are other kinds of silences. Keith Basso has recently been exploring in depth the silences of some American Indians (Basso 1970). The extreme of silence in my own experience was with some Lapps in northern Sweden (not in Norway) in an area once converted to Laestadian Christianity. We spent some days in a borrowed sod house in the village of Rensjoen (about 30 km west of Kiruna).² Our neighbors would drop in on us every morning just to check that things were all right. We would offer coffee. After several minutes of silence the offer would be accepted. We would tentatively ask a question. More silence, than a 'yes' or a 'no.' Then a long wait. After five or ten minutes we would ask another. Same pause, same 'yes' or 'no.' Another ten minutes, etc. Each visit lasted approximately an hour — all of us sitting formally. During that time there would be six

or seven exchanges. Then our guests would leave to repeat the performance the next day. While I don't know any of what these silences represented I will hazard a partial guess. As one goes north in the Scandinavian peninsula, particularly in Sweden, what is called 'the difficulty in expressing one's feelings' and the need for honesty and sincerity increase, while the amount of speech per hour decreases. Our neighbors felt they ought to visit, but perhaps one part of their silence was simply that they didn't have anything to say.

The conventions of speech transition are also interesting, and as we shall see later, relevant. In our society there are some interesting disagreements about the norms and meanings of interruption, for example. Some of these are ethnic, some appearing now to be generational. A number of factors are involved, but one meaning that seems to be attached to interruption in some minds is 'sincerity,' another 'intolerance' — not to mention more specifically normative reactions of rudeness and selfishness.³ A full discussion would take us too far afield. But we might notice Paul Goodman's remarks in *Making Do* (1963:35) about his behavior at a conference: 'I refused to be moved, but suddenly cut in, as I do — parenthetically, so to speak — to make a point that, in my opinion, needed saying at once, if we were going to make sense and not waste one another's time.' I suspect that there will be varieties of feeling, opinion, and interpretation of Goodman's practice of excusable interruptions.

We have looked at some conventions about silence' and transitions. By contrast Antiguan conventions appear, on the surface, almost anarchic. Fundamentally there is no regular requirement for two or more voices not to be going at the same time. The start of a new voice is not in itself a signal for the voice speaking either to stop or to institute a process which will decide who is to have the floor.

When someone enters a casual group, for example, no opening is necessarily made for him; nor is there any pause or other formal signal that he is being included. No one appears to pay any attention. When he feels ready he will simply begin speaking. He may be heard, he may not. That is, the other voices may eventually stop and listen, or some of them may; eyes may or may not turn to him. If he is not heard the first time he will try again, and yet again (often with the same remark). Eventually he will be heard or give up.

In such a system it is also true that there is no particular reason to find out what is going on or who is talking before one starts oneself. There is little pressure to relate one's subject to any state of the group. Therefore it is also quite reasonable to arrive talking, so to speak, and the louder one does so the greater the chances that one is heard.

There is no general norm against interruption, although as I've said one

may not be heard. But the fact that one is not heard does not mean one has to stop. One can go right on with perhaps one listener, or perhaps none. On some occasions, perhaps more serious, or particularly in more formal settings as part of an almost ritualized debate between sets of conventions, someone will be told to 'have some behavior' or 'let the man speak.' In many conversations, however, several participants already involved may feel that the point they are making is not receiving sufficient attention and will each of them continue speaking, repeating the point they are making — so that several people are speaking at once.

A number of norms and conventions insure that the stream of speech will be broken. While I have said that someone entering a group will not be given a place, he will be greeted. This greeting will be an aside. It will not let him in, or stop the main flow; but it will break it. It is not an invitation to join the conversation. There is a strong rule that all people with whom one has acquaintance or wishes to maintain any relations at all must be greeted. (Walking lost in thought is not recommended in the West Indies if one wants to keep one's friends. The amount of constant scanning and attention to others that most West Indians practice makes them all the rivals of some of our best politicians.) In a village if a group is sitting within sight of the road or standing on it then the people that must be greeted include everybody who comes up the road. Greetings will be exchanged in this way even with people who are inside their houses and who never look out. These greetings may just be a call or a name, but they may well include questions and answers, the making of future appointments, etc., all totally separate from the main stream of conversation which will continue just where it left off, which may well be and usually is the middle of a sentence.

But one does not need the excuse of having to greet someone. It is quite normal to interrupt oneself, perhaps to comment on something one sees out the window, and then perhaps a few minutes later continue one's sentence. It is also permissible among friends or with guests to fall asleep while talking, again perhaps waking up in a couple of minutes and continuing. In a brief conversation with me, about three minutes, a girl called to someone on the street, made a remark to a small boy, sang a little, told a child to go to school, sang some more, told a child to go buy bread, etc., all the while continuing the thread of her conversation about her sister.

There are of course in these settings no apologies for interruption, nor any set of signals (such as exceptionally quiet behavior on coming late to a lecture, etc.) that would mark or apologize for interrupting behavior. On the contrary there is a pervasive pattern of making what we can call *counter-noise*. If there is music on the radio in the living room someone in the kitchen may start talking loudly to himself, or hum, or bang the pots extra-loud. As someone told me, if one member of his household makes a noise the

other always want to outdo him. (That this is also relevant to speech, if not already clear, will become so when we look at the structure of argument.)

Can we now begin to ask the significance of these patterns? What, if anything, is expressed by them? First, one very general thing we can say is that if there is no sense of interruption, or need to stop if somebody else speaks, ongoing pattern of conversation, or need to stop if somebody else speaks, then the impulse to speak is not cued by the external situation but comes from within the speaker. These conventions treat the act of speaking, I would say, as primarily the expression, assertion, or proclamation of the speaker and/or his feelings — or his interests.

Thus to enter a conversation one must assert one's presence rather than participate in something formalized as an exchange. Similarly at restaurant counters or in stores there is the same failure to signal readiness for communication. One says aloud what one wants, nobody asks you. Neither is any sign given that your request has been heard. If you feel your request is not getting attention you may repeat it (how often depending on your character, how big a noise you like to make generally). But one must not assume in the remarks one makes that one has *not* been heard the first time or one will be rebuked. One is listened to. Assertion is also involved in patterns of counter-noise and argumentative reactions.

On the one hand speech is organized as a form of assertion. It is also closely tied to spontaneous expression of feelings. Questions on why people can fall asleep or shift subject in the middle of a sentence are usually answered in terms of the person's feelings — 'That's what he feels to do' — and the strong value put on not constraining one's feelings by artificial structures. A very beautiful and subtle attention to the feelings of others is a marked feature of West Indian tact.

Seeing the impulses to speech treated as coming from within, and closely tied to genuine expression of feelings, may help account for the fact that loud talking to oneself in the home or on the street or elsewhere is much more common in Antigua than in America. This is both expression of feeling and dramatization of oneself to others.

A most dramatic case of solitary, though public, expression of feeling occurred in Trinidad. A Barbadian woman who had lived twelve years in a north coast Trinidad village, was reported by a neighbor for building a house on government land at the back of the beach. The government came and took away the house — i.e., the woman's worldly possessions. As night came she collected all the scrap wood that was left from the demolition and started a fire, and all through the night she walked back and forth in front of the fire — cursing the village, proclaiming her ancestry, etc.

As opposed to their meaning as internal expression, assertion, proclamation, and dramatization — everyone playing his own tune in one Elizabethan

sense of noise — these conventions have a set of meanings which they got when contrasted with the more formal conventions associated with English culture: meanings of rudeness; stubbornness; 'ignorance' in the sense of unruly behavior, stupidity; 'noise' in the sense of disorder.

Some background is necessary. These patterns are primarily speech patterns of village life, although they pervade speech throughout much of the society on appropriate (informal), and on inappropriate, occasions. This is on an island of 108 square miles, which throughout almost all of its colonial history has been English. Since the latter part of the seventeenth century it has been primarily devoted to sugar plantations, these having been merged for most of the twentieth century into one large syndicate (which was recently liquidated). The flatness of the island, the absence of large refuge areas, has meant that the stratification system, and many of the customs, of plantation society have persisted until very recently. At emancipation the slaves had no place to go. Their dependence on the plantations was complete. There was no need to import laborers from India or elsewhere. The primary group in the population are thus descendants of African and New World-born slaves. A color class system (Smith 1956) of fairly typical form exists, with a few whites at its head. A number of other significant groups or subgroups exist, and there have been recent changes and divisions in the power structure, but these do not yet — or are only beginning to — affect the pattern I am discussing here. About three-quarters of this population (this figure changes rapidly) live in villages. Although various kinds of people live in the villages, they are primarily associated with 'lower class' residents. The significance of villages as social units, and some of the principles which organize social relations in them, have been discussed by R. T. Smith (1956:4-5, 148-9, 203-17) and recently by Peter Wilson (1969).⁴ Even where cultural traditions of villagers and the metropole, England, are most merged, it is clear that the idea of cultural division is present; alternate moral values exist and can be elicited, but they are normally communicated in indirect ways. An English-based creole language coexists and merges with local standard English. The speech conventions I am talking about in this paper coexist with more formal English patterns used on formal occasions. As I have said elsewhere (1970), Antiguans tend to maximize ambiguities of cultural reference and of expressive and moral meaning and then play with them to hide and manipulate the contradictions in their cultural patterns of value and expression. There is a duality of cultural patterning, both of creole vs. English speech and of 'African' vs. English culture. But this underlying duality is denied and covered by what is both a historical process and an ongoing symbolic technique of 'taking on' dominant cultural forms and 'remodelling' them so that the two cultural strands are woven into a complex garment of cultural

and linguistic expression. We shall return to the ways these relations organize alternate meanings of conventions and genres toward the end of the paper.

Some of the same meanings that we have seen at work in fundamental conventions organizing relations of speakers in space and time also attach to those genres of speaking which can be referred to as 'making noise.'

A principal form of proclamation of self is 'boasting.' It is a routine which shows up in a number of different conversational genres. Cross-culturally boasting varies greatly in its meanings, from our own concerns with 'reticence' and 'blowing your own horn' to the heroic boasting of Beowulf and the old Scandinavians. Antigua boasting runs a fine line between being an intrinsic source of humor and an eloquent, even preening, appreciation of one's own fine qualities. (One thinks a little of the twinkle in Douglas Fairbanks' eye as he performed some marvelous stunt).

A number of good examples show up in Trinidadian calypsoes by the Mighty Sparrow, such as:

We young and strong
We ain't afraid of soul in town
Who think they're bad
To meet them we're more than glad

I've got my gun
And Pardner I ain't making fun
If you're smart, clear the way
And if you think you bad
Make your play.

The boast is bravado plus challenge. Another calypso goes:

Is me the village ram
I don't give a damn
If any woman say that I
Leave she dissatisfy
She lie, she lie, she lie.

In Antigua these boasts have a special place as speakers announce themselves in speech competitions called singing meetings. One such speaker went by the title The Champion of Champions, and part of his march to the podium included such quatrains as:

I am the champion of champions
From my head to my toes
I must remain a champion
Wherever I goes.

h assertions are always followed by loud noise and cheering, banging on
es, etc.

imilar rhymes may be found in a village context, such as:

mi no ke wa mi du
kaz mi big, mi bad an mi buos
an mi jain di polis fuos.

boast, in this usage, means 'being assertive,' and returns us to the prob-
of the fine line between the serious and humorous.

He just feels he's set' or 'He just feels he's good' are approving remarks
preening behavior when the person is felt to be able to live up to the
ge he's creating. At the same time it is still felt as amusing, as joke-
stings, as I have said, is a basic form of humor. If a boast is made with
hing at all to back up the claim, then it is still funny — but at the
ense of the person who makes it.

it is the lack of this tension between claim and reality, of the element
self-awareness and mockery which makes the claim made by East Indians
rinidad — that their political leader, Dr Capildeo, is the world's greatest
hematologist — belong to another world of discourse.

it is our lack of understanding of the convention that made so many
mericans originally take Cassius Clay's boasting dead seriously, and con-
r him narcissistically sick. Eventually he educated many of us, yet the
sent negative feelings of some Americans toward him may in fact be
etermined not only by his later political positions, but by a lingering
ipicion attached to his boasting behavior.

Indeed the line is a fine one, and some West Indians working within the
vention may yet be expressing a very genuine narcissism.

Boasting is an essential form of defense against all forms of attack or
icism. Thus, when one woman challenged another for hogging the
t, 'You eat off all the mango, man,' she was answered, 'No bother me,
o, me nyam as me like,' 'I eat as I like,' i.e., I do what I want, I'm power-
Most such criticism is often called 'teasing' — a term that covers things
in mild banter or challenge to public statement of previously private
ths (or supposed truths), to outright defamation and insult. There is in
age conversation a constant pressing of the other party. This teasing is
d, among other things, to maintain a valued quality of 'hardness' in
ple, a positive acceptance of conditions in which they find themselves.

all children who fall and hurt themselves are bounced up and down as
g as necessary until they laugh. A particularly strong form of teasing
kely to appear if one shows signs of weakness. To give one example: a
ong man in his twenties was sitting on a back step bent over with stomach

pains; a girl came up to him and asked with no sympathy at all, 'You sick?'
I asked her if she didn't have any sympathy with his pain, to which she
answered 'mi want im fu ded,' 'I want him to die.' This gentle teasing is a
steady part of village life. Emotional consolation is hard to come by. If you
show you need it you will be teased, until you come back strong. This
drives people in varying degrees inside themselves.

The appropriate response to a tease or challenge is thus a boast, a show
of strength. To reply with insults in kind is felt to be unpolitic and is thus
taken as a sign of weakness, i.e., an indication that the other person's attack
is hitting home. Such teasing may be related to patterns of *Relajo* in Puerto
Rico (Lauria 1964) and perhaps distantly to the dozens (Abrahams 1962).

Cursing (Jamaican *kas-kas*, related by Cassidy and LePage [1967] to
Twi kasa-kasa; they give a Jamaican definition: 'to throw words') is a
highly stylized conversational genre, marked off by stylization from other
patterns of speaking, although it shares expressive features and meanings
with more private patterns of 'getting vex,' Cassidy and LePage include
in *kaskas* a 'row' which is public enough to become a 'scandal' — what
Antiguans call 'meli' as in the phrase 'meli high,' which refers in part to the
verbal noise people make when a dispute breaks into the open. 'Anancy
never like fe se' two people live neutral, so him start fe carry lie and story
between dem, and start big *kaskas*' (1967:265). Cassidy and LePage report
a clear separation between curse and the use of curses: to curse vs. to curse
bad words. But in Antigua at least the ambiguities are maintained between
'cursing' (which is legally actionable)⁵ and using indecent language (not
directed at anybody). The same ambiguity is maintained between the term
for creole, 'talk bad,' and the use of indecent language.

A cursing is a verbal dispute. It requires a public setting — an audience —
and one of the participants is thus usually on the road, directing abuse at
someone in or by a house. The main content of cursing turns out to be
interchanges of 'teasing' and 'boasting.' The aim is to shame the person
publicly (even though the cursing is officially a personal interchange) by
unveiling some private behavior he wished kept hidden or that is talked
about but never to his face. Sometimes between younger women things
will turn into a fight, in which case the aim is still to shame by unveiling —
tearing off clothes — thus giving entertainment to the men.

As with boasting, cursing exhibits a nice combination of the expres-
sive and the rhetorical. In general one is felt to resort to cursing when
carried away by strong feelings so that one can't help it. (In general it is
women's behavior, as 'argument' is men's.) One 'breaks away' into it. That
it is in fact deeply imbedded can be seen in the fact that some middle-class
town women will subject themselves to public ridicule for engaging in this

lower-class behavior when the provocation is great enough. The mother of a runner-up in the Antigua Carnival Queen beauty contest was so disappointed at her daughter's failure to win the title that she paraded for three days, several hours each day, before the house of the winner's mother, cursing the mother and impugning her relationship with the judges.

On the other hand all cursings are fundamentally theatrical and public events, and as such they are highly stylized. One person usually stands on the road (a man might prefer to be on a donkey — to maintain some dignity) and starts cursing, 'heating up' the other woman until usually she will come out and return the fire. Particularly if she feels the 'audience' is moving against her she will feel compelled to come out, unless she feels in a position to assert superior 'class' status, or reputation for conduct. One form of cursing is considered strictly rhetorical (although it does not differ noticeably in style) and is called 'showing off.' In one case I observed, a woman stood before the house of two of her brother's twenty-year-old daughters, cursing them for about two hours for taking food from her, and cursing her own daughter for bringing it to them. In spite of the violence of her harangue I was assured that she was just using the occasion to let the village know that she was feeding the two girls and their small children. In another case a respected man passed down the road cursing a cow he was driving before him, and it was explained to me that 'It's pride makes him do it,' i.e., he was showing off his cow.

The public theatrical quality of cursing is supported by the fact that it is a learned behavior in which one may take pride. Once when I expressed an interest in cursing, a twelve-year-old girl was called over, and her exceptional cursing ability was shown off to me. (Since cursing has been and sometimes still is actionable, most cursing is hard to record — neither notebook nor tape recorder are appreciated.) The performance is featured by a characteristic intonation, an extension of pitch range, emphatic high pitches and rising glides, with a tendency to rhythmic even stress on each syllable. There are often pauses between sentences, accompanied by a spinning motion, turning away, arms akimbo, leaning from the waist, head stuck forward — reconstituting one's forces and then spinning back to the attack.

Common attacks are for a woman to reveal that another woman is sleeping with her husband. She might begin, 'Why don't you find your own man and leave other people's men alone?' To which a response is a boast in three parts: 1. If your man didn't want me, he wouldn't come by me. 2. I never called him. 3. If he likes me better than you, I'm not responsible. In one case the wife then took off on the other woman's thinness and character, combining into her attack a threat and boast of her own. The gist of her argument was:

You don't have any flesh!

I'm going to work obeh (witchcraft) on you!

And this here (clutching her genitals) is going to pay for it!

And you won't be able to do the same back,

Because you're too thin!

You're too thin!

After which she turned to finish off the woman's character by asserting:

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,

You have them all!

In neither cursing nor argument does anyone stoop to answer directly the other's accusation or position. But if insult and boast at least form complementary patterns of utterance and response in cursing, the essential feature of argument is the *non-complementarity of repetition*. Each person takes a point or position and repeats it endlessly, either one after the other, or both at once, or several at once depending on the number of people participating. Points of view are rarely developed, merely reasserted. The pure type is the argument after a cricket game, or other sport. The young men converge on the field and proceed to take a position on who was the best player, who should have won, etc. Each keeps yelling his point full voice until, usually, certain voices seem to prevail and the others fade. This type of 'discussion' may last for an hour or two.

We have said that everyone is pushing his own point implying, perhaps, except for our restaurant counter example, that they were not listening at all. But this is not true. There is a kind of scanning process at work which listens with multiple attention and which ultimately determines which voices will prevail. The constant repetition of the same point is of relevance here. One 'tends to hear' what is being said and if you miss it the first time it will probably be repeated.

Repetition is not only acceptable speech behavior in Antigua, it appears to have positive value attached. Things, including humor, improve and enrich with repetition. As opposed to traditions which seek to make sharp or subtle confrontations of meaning by the context in which words are placed, West Indian humor seems to leave the word free to pick up what meanings the audience rather than the speaker can provide. He extends the invitation. This may be done by stressing a word, by repetition, or more particularly by using a word which everybody knows is funny this season. The kinds of relationships that are discovered are not unobvious; it is just that the subtlety may as well rest with the group as with the speaker. Repetition then has the effect of intrinsically making something funny, and the word which is the center of concern is somehow valuable in its own right, as a vehicle of interpersonal activity. One device of this kind

is illustrated by a man who went into an ice cream store and ordered 'a double.' 'Double what?' asked the girl behind the counter. 'Double, now' answered the man, meaning 'I said a double,' or 'Come, now, a double,' (*now* in this use has rising intonation). In other words he gives a challenge to make what you can of the word. The pattern is very common.

Just as a song, by repetition, becomes part of the very fabric of life on the island before it slowly fades away, so words are similarly taken up, elaborated, put through all their paces, and then replaced by new ones. Such a word was 'knuckle,' introduced from Trinidad. 'Knuckle' in its simplest use meant that a girl was unfaithful to you, with some of the same overtones and direct humorous reaction as cuckold's horns had in Europe and England at one time. It was put in the context of the words *get* and *give*. One started by getting knuckle. Then one gave it. Soon the girls were taking up the word as a claim, partly humorous, to equal sexual rights or to the fidelity of their men. They were saying that they didn't keep knuckle. That they could give as well as get, and do it just as well. The word began appearing everywhere. Contexts were no longer necessary at all. Hardly a conversation for several weeks occurred without 'knuckle' appearing. A hotel owner shot at his wife's boyfriend at a swimming pool party. Soon the phrase all over the island was 'nækl a di kapitl a antiuga' 'Knuckle is the capital of Antigua.' And then the word died. The whole thing lasted about four months.

To have something to say that is worth hearing and also repeatable implies that it is fairly short, and as a result, there is a process of condensation and allusion at work all the time. One is expected in many contexts to 'catch' the meaning. And conversely there is a feeling that undue explicitness implies a dull person.

Repetition is essential, then, to the structure of argument. In developed form argument is primarily men's conversation. But it is available as a means of expression in a variety of social contexts — including between daughters of the urban middle class at the kitchen table. It is not, primarily, serious, i.e., expressive of deep emotions (although natural feelings find openings through its forms). And while it may contain boasts ('I am the greatest,' 'No, I am') it avoids teasing.

Many kinds of conversation may turn to argument. Indeed it doesn't need an excuse. If two men are sitting on a back step, one of them may mention a slightly contentious fact just so they may amuse themselves by having an argument over it. 'The paper say he ran the race in fifty minutes,' 'No man, forty!' and off they go. As sound provokes counter-sound, so any claim can provoke an argumentative response; any boast can be challenged within the egalitarian conventions of ordinary village life.

'So I made a heaven of a noise,' says George Lamming, 'which is characteristic of my voice and an ingredient of West Indian behavior.' 'For,' he says again, 'there is no voice which can make more noise in an argument than the West Indian voice.' Perhaps we are in a better position now to understand what is behind these statements. But we still need to know a little more about how or when a noise is a melodious sound and when cacophony.

Cursing and argument share meanings with the more fundamental conventions which enter into their structure, meanings about expression and assertion, about feeling and rhetoric, which are felt as 'natural' ways of expression and communication by their users and in the ordinary social relations of village life. Events containing boasts and loud argument are a source of humor and entertainment; they are called 'sweet,' i.e., pleasurable in a common West Indian usage, in the same sense as sweet airs in *The Tempest*.

But these conventions are also seen in the perspective of dominant 'English' cultural patterns used in formal settings, in public by people of high status, normally in church and school, and as signs of respect when talking to strangers or to people of higher status.

These 'polite' patterns are accepted as 'better' and from this point of view the kinds of speech we have been looking at are seen as unruly, disruptive, stubborn, and disorderly — in a word as 'noise.' So we have an ambiguity and tension between noise as each person's tune, his inner impulse to expression and assertion (which he doesn't question), and noise as the chaotic result when these impulses are applied within formal settings.

Since formal speech is itself a claim to status such settings are natural triggers for counter-noise when the statuses are not sufficiently high, or the 'respect' is not sufficiently great to maintain more formal order. Many village rituals act out this ambivalence by oscillating in their established conventions between 'formality' and 'argument.' Formality is established by having a 'chairman' and by various forms — notably parliamentary procedure. Books of toasts and other oratory circulate around the village. The tradition of formal eloquence is institutionalized in Singing Meeting speech competitions, and includes false Latin; Latin with some very significant deviations in the translations; the declaiming of hymn rhymes from the Sankey hymnal, proverbs, and school-memorized poetry; and a number of tags calling for appropriate behavior such as:

I ask for your best decorum
Your strict attention
and above all your taciturnity

or:

- A is for attention
 B is for behavior
 C is for conduct
 and D is for dignity.

The assertion even of temporary status as 'chairman' and the assertion of these 'higher' cultural patterns, by a fellow villager, will almost immediately provoke an argumentative response, disrupting the very pattern that has been called for. Even in church, on such occasions as Harvest services, when villagers give recitations and sing solos, there will be disruptive response just to the degree that someone seems to be enjoying the role of speaker.⁵

But christening party ritual is perhaps the best example of what I am talking about. While this begins with all the usual formal apparatus, the central ritual is an 'argument.' A table is set up with a cake in the middle and a plate at each end. The master of ceremonies then says, 'I am determined on my determination that this cake mustn't cut,' and puts some money on the plate near him. Someone else answers by saying, 'The cake must be cut,' and money is put on the other plate. This goes on, with interruptions, alternate themes, occasional chaos, and occasional hymns, for about an hour, until such money as is available has been raised.

At the beginning of the event the formal scene predominates. Counter-noise begins slowly. For a while one may have only a duet. But eventually things will warm up to a crescendo of 'argument,' which may eventually dissolve into a hymn. The hymn itself may be called for several times, someone may begin to sing the opening line, but often several entries of the hymn — as in entering a conversation — are necessary before the hymn actually begins.

The repetition of theme characteristic of argument, the lack of strong norm against interruption, the acceptance of two or more voices talking at the same time, the pattern of entry into a conversation by knocking several times, and the personal expressive associations of speaking sometimes add up to give to certain conversations a *truly contrapuntal air*.

Such patterns of noise can be seen as, and often are, simple negations of the rational conventions of the society, simple blockheadedness if you will. (One might for example consider the constant advice to Black movements in the United States not to be so 'noisy,' if I may put it that way, not to be so stubborn in their demands, or curse in the courtroom and ignore its form.) I have tried to show how these conventions are tied to underlying notions about expression and about the way people relate or should relate to each other.⁷

NORM-MAKERS, NORM-BREAKERS: USES OF SPEECH BY MEN AND WOMEN IN A MALAGASY COMMUNITY

ELINOR KEENAN

The community

Namoizamanga is a hamlet composed of twenty-four households, situated in the southern central plateau of Madagascar. This area is generally referred to as *Vakinankaratra*,¹ meaning 'broken by the Ankaratra.' The Ankaratra Mountains do in fact form a natural boundary in the north. They separate this area somewhat from other parts of the central plateau area. This separation has sociological significance in that the people of this community and communities nearby identify themselves as Vakinankaratra. The present generation recognize an historical link with the dominant plateau group, the Merina, but choose a separate social identity.

A partial explanation for this parochialism lies in the nature of the ties which brought these people formerly in contact. In the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, people of the Vakinankaratra were conquered by the Merina and brought north as slaves. When the French abolished ownership of slaves and the existence of a slave class (*andevo*), many slaves moved back into the traditional homeland of their ancestors. A villager speaks of this time with great difficulty and embarrassment. The people know themselves to be former *andevo* and are known by others to be such, but the term itself is almost never used. To address or refer to someone as *andevo* is a grave insult. Genealogical reckoning is shallow, typically going back two to three generations. With some exceptions, local histories begin with the settling of ancestors into these villages in the early part of this century.

Within the village, fixed distinctions in social status are few. All members of a community (who are part of a household) are considered *havana* (kinsmen). Those outside the community are *vahiry* (guests, strangers). Within the *havana* group, those adults who have taken a spouse, especially those with children, are considered to be *ray-aman-dreny* (elders; literally 'father-and-mother') of the community. A respected adult without spouse or children can be a *ray-aman-dreny*, but the status typically implies these qualifications.