Prototyping self in Silicon Valley: Deep diversity as a framework for anthropological inquiry

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Abstract

High-technology work fuels a dynamic global exchange from technopoles throughout the world, but especially between East and South Asia and the northern Californian region of Silicon Valley. This migration drives an expanded number of ancestral identities. Professional and activity-based identities flourish as Silicon Valley's strong narrative of meritocracy loosens the grip of birth ascription on the creation of identities. These achieved identities proliferate as people experiment on their own sense of self. Traditional conceptual tools related to immigration, and even such contemporary approaches as Appadurai's ethnoscapes, do not adequately illuminate the ethnographic data on Silicon Valley workers, families, and especially youth. The concept of deep diversity, first posed by philosopher Charles Taylor and reified by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, reinterprets the interactions of traditional ethnic identity categories, providing a powerful framework with which to think.

> What we need are ways of thinking that are responsive to particularities, to individualities, oddities, discontinuities, contrasts, and singularities, responsive to what Charles Taylor has called 'deep diversity,' a plurality of ways of belonging and being, and that yet can draw from them – from it – a sense of connectedness, a connectedness that is neither comprehensive or uniform, primal nor changeless, but nonetheless real. (Geertz 2000: 224)

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Silicon Valley, even during periodic economic recessions, remains the hub of a dynamic global flow of technologies, funds and ideas among silicon places throughout the world. People, especially from East and South Asia, sojourn to northern California for education and work, adding to the region's cultural mix. This migration is an extension of earlier agricultural labor mobility, which together creates a complex repertoire of identities based on nationality and ancestry. Professional and activity-based identities flourish and Silicon Valley's strong narrative of meritocracy undermines the grip of birth ascription on the creation of identities. A variant of the American Dream, the pervasive 'garage myth' suggests that a good invention or creative application, pursued with entrepreneurial zeal, can change the fate of any person. Hewlett-Packard began in a garage, as did Apple, and the narrative comes out of the mouths of political leaders and adolescent gamers alike. Privileging achievement over birth status encourages experimentation on self in which identities proliferate. In this article, I will discuss the problems inherent in studying a region whose culture has become iconic – in which people are globally connected, technologically literate, and self-conscious of the advantages cosmopolitan identities confer in the new economy. In such a postmodern site, traditional conceptual tools related to immigration, and even such contemporary approaches as Appadurai's ethnoscapes, do not adequately illuminate the ethnographic data on Silicon Valley's workers, families, and youth. Deep diversity adds the missing component.

In this article, I trace my own search for a conceptual framework robust and elastic enough for me to adapt to the Silicon Valley context, and in turn produce new conceptual insights. The concept of *deep diversity*, first posed by Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor and reified by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, reinterprets the interactions of traditional ethnic identity categories. First posed as a political model for creating a multicultural Canada, the idea of deep diversity can be adapted to help anthropologists think about global urban interactions. Deep diversity posits that cultural practices reflect significant differences, and cannot be dismissed or channeled into superficial holidays. This model also suggests that as categories multiply and become dense within a particular region, maintaining discrete identities becomes more difficult. Aspects of particular heritage identities are exaggerated, minimized, co-opted and contested. Through social contact both intimate and glancing, new hybrid identities occur. These differences are also dynamic, constantly changing as landscapes of power select for some cultural activities, and drive others into the background. Power relations, such as class-based racism, will still appear, but the ambiguity introduced by the discourse of meritocracy leads to new strategies of interaction. If Silicon Valley's optimism, privileged economic niche and symbolic capital were to erode, it would certainly not be as clear an illustration of deep toleration. Nonetheless, by taking Taylor's model and introducing it to a new context – the interpretation of ethnographic data – deep diversity is made less abstract, becoming the kind of middle-level theory that can generate new insights. By examining identity management in the Silicon Valley region in light of deep diversity, I can elaborate and operationalize the notion.

I begin retracing my steps by focusing on particular aspects of Silicon Valley culture. Much of the information about the region has been the product of a two-decade-long program, the Silicon Valley Cultures Project.[1] Composed of numerous research endeavors, large and small, the information in this article comes from several projects in which research was focused on the connection between identities, the interactions of people enacting different identities, and innovation. Understanding these differences, however, was difficult given that many of our ideas about situational identity were rooted in slower and simpler social processes. Silicon Valley, like many other places, is globally connected, and these connections are rapid and each connection interacts with others. The dynamism of situational identification and intercultural interaction in Silicon Valley was startling, especially among its youth. The cultural differences that did exist ran deep, but nonetheless could constantly be reworked. Specific stories from Silicon Valley students and workers illustrate these discoveries. The geography of identity and interaction highlighted another facet of cosmopolitan identity work; Silicon Valley's diversity was complex, and this complexity reshaped the landscape into a new order of phenomenon. Complex diversity was not just more of the same old story, it was a new story. The discovery of the theoretical concept deep diversity reshaped my own research questions, and reordered the analysis of the observations. I will discuss these ideas, and how Taylor's model changed when translated from abstract suggestions of how a multicultural society should unfold to explanations of how such a site actually behaves. That revised notion allows me to rethink the properties and practices of diversity.

Silicon Valley, nexus of a global network

Silicon Valley is an elastic and imaginary designation, with boundaries that expand and contract with the global high-technology economy, but are no less real than boundaries imposed by governmental decree. Situated in northern California, at the southern end of the San Francisco Bay Area, it can be seen as a physical space with a focused economic niche, a short-hand for regional marketing to attract businesses, or a postmodern imagined state of mind that embraces technology and entrepreneurial risk. It is not a governmental entity, and the region overlaps loosely with Santa Clara, San Mateo and parts of Santa Cruz and Alameda counties, hence data about it will shift depending on the unit of accounting.

Silicon Valley is a region with a specialized economic niche, the production of disruptive technologies, that is, technical inventions that change the direction of research, development, production and consumption. Personal computers are not just smaller versions of large corporate or governmental mainframe computers; their designers rethought the technical frameworks for interaction and application (e.g. the graphical user interface, the mouse and the shift from numerical computing to word-based production and gaming). Silicon Valley has been at the heart of many such disruptions to the trajectory of technology development and consciously celebrates its own creativity. The opportunity and rewards for this

creativity have transformed the former prune capital of the world into a magnet for national and global migration, drawing in highly educated migrants to populate the high-tech sector, and more humble migrants to labor in schools, shops and construction. Considered to be a core regional advantage, the act of bringing together people from different parts of the United States and the world, and asking them to work across cultural differences, requires creative professionals to be more flexible and innovative (English-Lueck 2002).

Several structural changes in American immigration policy made this transformation possible. In the aftermath of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, immigration increased from Asia, from 4 percent in 1901–20 to 39 percent during the period from 1980–93. The 1990 amendment to the immigration laws expanded the use of H1-B visas to recruit skilled workers, particularly from India and greater China. These visas allow individuals with distinctive intellectual or technical skills to get residency to work and live in the United States. Migration from South and East Asia exploded and the region is now a minority majority space, where foreign-born and 'people of color' numerically dominate (see Banerjee 2006; Center for Immigration Studies 1995).

Although using census categories is problematic, and even contrary to the way I maintain identity works in the region, it is pragmatic to describe the region using those older categories of diversity. Silicon Valley has 2.9 million people, 40 percent of whom are 'white, non-Hispanic', 29 percent Asian, 25 percent Hispanic, 2.6 percent black non-Hispanic and less than 1 percent Native American, in spite of the fact that the Bay Area is home to one of the largest populations of urban Indians (Henton 2010: 2). Forty-five thousand people in the cities of San Jose/Sunnyvale/Santa Clara identify as belonging to two or more 'races' (US Census Bureau 2006b). In the 2000 census, 60 percent of California's mixed race births occurred in Santa Clara county, the primary administrative unit in Silicon Valley (Stern 2005: 5). While 12 percent of the nation is foreign born, 36 percent of the legal immigrants and sojourners to Silicon Valley were born outside the United States, 58 percent of whom were born in Asia (Henton 2010: 2; Hirschman 2005: 598). Linguistically, nearly half (48%) speak a language other than English at home, and of those linguistically diverse people, 43 percent speak an Asian or Pacific Islander language (Henton 2010: 13).

The ethnoscape, the cultural landscape of the region, is distinctive. Appadurai emphasizes the imaginary and the ephemeral in his conceptualization of ethnoscape (see Appadurai 1996: 33). However, the Silicon Valley social milieu created by the interaction of immigrant, work and hybrid identities is strikingly stable and nimble. Silicon Vikings from Scandinavia bring their families, who are schooled with Dinka Lost Boys from the Sudan. Meanwhile, the eight thousand or so Native Americans in San Jose (and immediate environment) struggle to maintain tribal distinctions while they are surrounded by larger ethnic groups (Christie 1997; Ramirez 2007). In that situation, cultural exchange is rampant, and Native California tribal peoples are dominated by the more vocal and numerous Lakota from the Midwest, or by Latinos who identify with the Aztecas. Shankar, in her ethnography of

adolescent Desi, a vernacular term for Indo-Americans, in Silicon Valley documents a similar phenomenon. In high schools where there is a critical mass, differentiation occurs. Students who speak Punjabi group together; those who are a similar class status connect around Desi bling, jewelry and cars. However, minority Indians, such as Tamil speakers, have to become more generically Indian and perhaps even pick up Punjabi slang. At one high school, where they are marginal, Desi students adopt the make-up and dress of Latina students (Shankar 2003, 2006).

To illustrate the intricacy of global identities, I will focus my examples on a brief discussion of the diasporic Chinese. Even within this relatively narrow channel, the complexity of interactions and global reach is apparent. The history of Chinese immigration to the San Francisco Bay Area runs deep. The diversity of diasporic experiences is fundamental to the differentiation of Chinese in this region. From the Gold Rush era, through the building of the railroad, 'Sino-California' is built into the fabric of the state (Starr 2005: 119). Nineteenth-century ethnic migratory labor in agriculture and commerce established a Cantonese Chinese presence in the Bay Area, made painful by intense racism. The great grandchildren of those early immigrants intermarried with other ethnic groups and became increasingly less distinctively Chinese and more Asian Californian. San Francisco State University was the site of the first ethnic studies program promoting an Asian American consciousness (Teraguchi 2004). The scale of migration from Greater China means that categories such as 'Chinese' can be parsed much more finely. Large groups, such as the Chinese, have so much critical mass that they can afford to differentiate themselves – Taiwanese from Tainan (in the south) distinguish themselves from those from Taipei (in the north), Chinese from Shanghai differentiate themselves from Beijing émigrés (see Wong 2006: 190).

The earlier diasporas used kinship and place of origin to form viable commercial networks in the new environment. In the United States education in particular was a core focus for Chinese families. The overseas Chinese of North America are the best educated in the global diaspora (Peng 2002: 431–2). In Santa Clara County 64.5 percent of the Chinese have a university degree, including post-graduate degrees (US Census Bureau 2006a). The older diasporic community continues to provide a base through which new migrants can flow. Hua Wong, an ethnic Chinese Burmese immigrant and prototype manufacture inspector for a large computer company, began her residency in the Bay Area in San Francisco. There she did piece work sewing garments for Cantonese employers. From there she, and her family, used high-tech employment for social mobility, first in manufacturing, and once her children were educated, in design.

The virulent racism that created the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882, 1892 and 1902 was modified by a century of co-existence but influenced intercultural interaction more subtly. In the Bay Area, the era of 'coolies' was gone, but the advent of 'high-tech or techno-coolies' had begun. Immigration to the Silicon Valley region from 1985–2000 was dominated by Chinese; 37 percent of immigrants were from China, 13 percent from Taiwan, and 3 percent from Vietnam, including many

ethnic Chinese (Saxenian 2006: 53). In the 1980s the new diasporic Chinese were placed in technical positions. There was some pay disparity, although that disparity eroded over the next decade (Saxenian 2006: 55; Wong 2006: 36). However, access to management and entrepreneurial opportunities was more critical than the monetary glass ceiling. Assumed language barriers, embodied restraint and repression of competitive lust were seen as barriers to effective management by non-Asian co-workers. In short, the subtler stereotypes of habitus kept the new Chinese from developing the reputations needed to excel in the business side of high-technology; they were kept behind cubicle walls. The biases are less overt, but nonetheless formed a statistically significant barrier (Shih 2006; Varma 2002: 337).

Chinese immigrants responded with a variety of strategies to circumvent these barriers by creating professional organizations, using transnational personal networks to get a technical edge, and mentoring incoming immigrants (Varma 2002: 356). The diasporic Chinese community built active networks to rival the non-Asian 'old boys' who had dominated companies and laboratories. As they formed ethnically-based or transnational entrepreneurial companies, they job-hopped to maximize individual success (Shih 2006: 188). We can see examples of this pattern in the professional organizations that form platforms for Chinese networking. Some are Asian-American, using English language media. The Monte Jade Science and Technology Association courts ties with Taiwan, while the Silicon Valley Chinese Engineers or the North American Chinese Semiconductor Association pursue ties to the People's Republic of China. Typically presentations include modeling successful entrepreneurs or managers and provide a forum for technical and market information. Unlike prior diasporas, local origin and family connections move to the background while skills and company affiliation move to the foreground (Saxenian 2006: 61–3; Wong 2006: 59). Even non-Chinese participate in these professional organizations when English is the lingua franca.

Silicon places are networked together through the actions of individuals and organizations. The Hsinchu-Taipei corridor evolved out of a combination of entrepreneurial efforts and strategic Taiwanese governmental policies, including promoting overseas Chinese investment. Efforts such as Aspire Park used creativity and technical expertise, cultural elements picked up during the glass ceiling era in Silicon Valley, to change work culture in Taiwan. In the 1980s Acer, a leading Taiwanese manufacturer, established an outpost in Silicon Valley to do software research and development (Tsai 2006). By 2000, Taiwan had created 'substantially more patents per capita than the other newly industrialized countries in Asia' (Saxenian 2006: 125). A new landscape of power had been created. The meteoric economic success of the People's Republic in the first decade of the 21st century has changed the way Chinese immigrants are viewed.

The groupings used to define ethnicity are not power-neutral. Race and ethnicity become proxies for class, as the descriptive statistics about these categories and education reveal. Graduation rates underscore the power differences in ethnic communities, scaling from Hispanic students for whom the dropout rate is nearly 20 percent to Asian students at 5 percent. Although Latino students comprise

33 percent of the high school student population, only 24 percent of those high school graduates qualify for university. For Asians, who make up 23 percent of the high school population, 68 percent meet the requirements to attend public universities (Henton 2010: 30).

In spite of these numbers, and others that indicate that structural racism and classism has not vanished from Silicon Valley institutions, there is a powerful cultural discourse of self-agency. As migrants make the transition from natal cultural identification to 'belonging to Silicon Valley culture', they repeat the narrative of meritocracy. Individual accomplishment is privileged and places the burden of success and failure on the individual. People believe themselves, as individuals, to be responsible for their fates and bear the social and emotional responsibility for life-long learning and strategic planning. This means that individuals constantly walk a fine line between needing to change, 're-inventing' themselves, and staying in larger categories that can provide a sense of community.

The elasticity of identity takes the notion of situational identity, enacting different representations of self to different stakeholders as contexts change, to new levels of nuance. Situational identity is constantly being, to use a technological metaphor, 'refreshed' and changed. Cultural identities are built around social and recreational activities, gender conceptions and preferences, religious and political beliefs, and various mixtures of the above. This malleability makes identity less easy to classify and use in any meaningful way in daily interaction. In doing research on identity in Silicon Valley, I was struck by how rarely I encountered identity certainty, but instead saw people struggling with ambiguity. As Mr Jefferies, one of the mentors in a local high school, notes: '[On this campus] you can't possibly identify [students] by looking at them. I think it a much more diverse environment for us and for our children to be in. People [are] negotiating it.' For these Silicon Valley youth, cultural bridges are being constructed to connect the different communities. The national, ethnic and cultural identities of the students, and their adult teachers and peers, were diverse indeed. People identified a number of ancestral affiliations besides European origins including Latino, Native American, Chinese, Thai, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Iranian, Ethiopian and African-American. They also identified themselves into behavioral categories such as 'gay', 'queer' or 'geeks'. Networking across and among the cultural categories was daily work.

Situational identity 2.0

In Silicon Valley, the increased density of differences, and their distribution, will mean that some identities are narrow and intense, while others are broad and diffuse. Cultural differences are more than speaking a different language or celebrating a particular festival; being different provides alternative structures of meaning. In one set of circumstances, a narrow definition matters, such as being a Microsoft certified software engineer from Shanghai. Under other conditions, that same person may be drawn into identification with Silicon Valley, as his son

comes home to describe the joys of gaining rank in the game 'World of Warcraft'. People do what appear to be the same things for quite different reasons. Sometimes this leads to the familiar world of attributive stereotyping. At other times, new frameworks of meaning are created, as Taiwanese engineers reinvent themselves as Silicon Valley-style entrepreneurs. The complexity of difference, given the dynamics of the global urban landscape, can both foment fusion and sharpen demarcations. The resulting experimentation in culture effects change for individuals, communities and transnational policies.

Cindy Chen illustrates how this dance of situational representation occurs among young people. Cindy is the center of one of the networks my colleagues and I studied to understand the global reach of youth networks. She is 16, born in Texas, although her mother and sister are from Taiwan. After moving to Silicon Valley, her father died, leaving Mrs Chen a widow supporting two young women by doing accounting work at a fiber optic firm. She spoke Japanese as a child and is thrilled that her daughter is studying Japanese. She is even more thrilled that in spite of spurning Chinese Saturday school, Cindy still can speak Mandarin to friends and relatives from Taiwan. To Mrs Chen, Cindy is a good girl, studious, focused on getting into a good university and law program. Cindy's Asianness only partly stems from her language competency. Being on the nearly all-Asian school badminton team, as are the other teams from eastern San Jose, is as much a part of her cultural practice as keeping her linguistic skills intact. Her best friends are Vietnamese, also in badminton and also studying Japanese. As Cindy moves through her day, she engages in habitus code-switching (see Bourdieu 1998). Her exposure to supposedly similar people differentiates her, and her life with 'others' gives her platforms for identity. Her networks are the critical glue that link households, families and their globally dispersed kin and colleagues (Darrah et al. 2007). Are her connections from the Silicon Valley region to the Asian Pacific nodes of Vietnam, Taiwan and Japan? What exactly is flowing in the global flows and how is it being fused with other elements? Her family and network reside within structured flows, shaped by immigration policies, and the regional economy. Larger scale sociopolitical interactions (e.g. international educational exchange or the legacy of Japanese rule in Taiwan) shape other aspects of her experience of diversity.

Cindy's friend, Tran, a Vietnamese-American, is also an advanced student of Japanese and involved in the same Advanced Placement courses. Tran just began her first job doing karaoke style recording for tourists at an amusement park. She frequently chats with her friends using an instant messaging application on her computer about alternative rock/pop music. Julio is Cindy's online buddy and a classmate from Algebra 2. For a time he pursued her as a possible girlfriend, and still thinks her 'cool'. He is 18 and planning to go to a culinary academy. He is estranged from his mother and considers the African-American-Filipino family of his ex-girlfriend his second family. His father and grandfather have moved back to Mexico. Julio spends five hours a day on instant messaging, finding it a more real and intimate form of communication than telephone or face-to-face. One of his best friends is Matt, part of the e-circle and network Julio calls his

'Mexican buddies', or the group he calls 'yomutta'. Of course, Matt's 'not actually, but might as well be Mexican'. Matt talks the talk, eats the food and lives his life as if he were Latino. In Matt's, Julio's and Cindy's world, actually having the ancestry is one of the criteria, but not a necessary one, of formulating an identity. Silicon Valley teens are experimenting on themselves – mixing ethnic and other identities to develop relationships across groups (see Shankar 2003: 130). Not all teens actually bear this out in daily behavior, but they do articulate that 'mixing' groups, 'not limiting' oneself to one set of practices, is 'cool'.

When framing the identities of Cindy and her friends, notice the significant bias that we scholars of diversity unconsciously enact. We tend to assume a priori that actual ancestry is necessary for identity. As Julio and Matt illustrate, must this be the case? Asianness, even Chineseness, is not exclusively enacted by people whose ancestors, however distant, came from China. Of course, orientalism, selective cultural borrowing by the European and American dominant society, is a well established phenomenon. However, living in complex and shifting diversity makes traditional cultural guideposts more ambiguous, and reshuffling and reinvention are facilitated.

How many kinds of cultural interactions could Cindy Chen have in her urban high school? To answer that question, I examined the linguistic and cultural categories represented in the region's primary and secondary educational ethnoscape. I engaged in the following thought experiment, contrasting a relatively simple ethnoscape with Silicon Valley's cultural mosaic. Not to understate the existing complexity, the area north of Flagstaff, Arizona, has Hopi and Navajo, defined by the state and by well-worn, if often challenged, linguistic and familial criteria. *Bahana*, or if speaking Dine, *bilagaana* European descendents comprise the 'other'. With only three categories, seven overall interactions are possible (each can interact within the category, between any two categories and between all three). Calculating the complexity of cultural interactions in the Silicon Valley region, using a conservative minimum of 50 linguistic/ethnic categories, 1.125 quadrillion interactions were possible! Given that 50 was a number derived from gross linguistic and nationally based ancestral categories, adding other criteria for cultural identity, such as region, religion, passionate dedication to Steve Job's Apple vision, drives the complexity of the diverse interactions into astronomical numbers (English-Lueck 2002: 117, 137). Transnational interaction and communication change the ethnic experience. The very complexity of diversity in a global city makes it much less predictable and more ambiguous. Alternate forms of identity, not based on heritage, interact with traditional categories of ethnicity as emerging identities compete or are coupled with those ancestrally-based statuses.

The way in which the vague realms of global and local are connected is rife with anthropological assumptions, what Moore calls 'pre-theoretical commitments' to a particular way of conceptualizing culture. If you see culture as holistic and totalizing that sends you in one direction, struggling to fit the local into the global. A world systems approach would be an example of the former, trying to see how structures of capitalism shape a particular locale. Aspects of Appadurai's

Ptolemaic 'scape' spheres (ethnoscape, technoscape, etc.) similarly emphasize trans-national interactions within particular realms, reinforcing particular domains such as economy, migration, and technology (Appadurai 1996). Alternatively, if culture is viewed as a bricolage – a fragmented and chaotic construction – that perspective privileges a different interpretation of global-local interaction. Appadurai has created a typology with this metaphorical 'scape' that applauds the anarchic and emphasizes 'the disjunctive' (Moore 2004: 79). Similarly, anthropologist Tsing is comfortable with a turbulent globalization in which higher order processes meet the local in a process she calls 'friction' (Tsing 2005). This approach esteems the particular, the ethnographically local individualized experience. While it is possible to use both approaches, the holistic and the fragmented, to move systematically from the individual, through the neighborhood, region, and nation to the transnational, neither approach does so comfortably. A structured approach lends itself to emphasizing governmentalities, so that the structures of political power – city, state and nation – become the default categories of social analysis. The more anarchic approach makes an orderly scale almost inconceivable. What is a region, if the interactions between local and global are imagined and fragmentary? Anthropologists need to embrace both the lived experiences of human beings and broad global structures, and so need another tool to help them organize their thinking about different scales of interaction.

I would like to insert another conceptual approach into this theoretical space, one that can potentially bridge the two diverse poles. Although Taylor has a heavy 'pre-theoretical commitment' to the nation as a totalizing concept, there is a deceptive amount of flexibility in his idea of deep diversity. This concept problematizes ethnic identity categories. However, his idea of deep diversity is heuristic – it can be taken farther than he has himself taken it. Taylor argues that there are different levels of political engagement in a multicultural context. Simply identifying differences in culture and outlook, but assuming that all are ultimately under a single undifferentiated national umbrella, is 'first level diversity'. Diversity in this mode is a shallow concept, referring to the maintenance of memory and tradition at the local level, but relative homogeneity within the nation-state. In this model, moral panic is engendered as people worry about 'losing' their distinctive identities, becoming a 'disappearing culture'. Accepting that people as distinct as Quebecois or Dene might view even belonging itself 'in a very different way' points to deep diversity (Redhead 2002b; Taylor 1993).

The complexity of the cultural landscape in Silicon Valley, as in other global urban spaces, strains the explanatory power of the dominant anthropological theories of 'difference'. Like London, or Hong Kong, Silicon Valley is a hub for global flows of people and assumptions, material culture, and practices they bring. However, the extreme discourse of meritocracy inherent in high-technology work, emphasizing pragmatism and achievement, undermines the identities that are birth ascribed – ethnicity, race, and even class status. Coupled with a zeal for experimentation and innovation, embedded in Silicon Valley's technical and corporate discourses, people tinker with their own identities. They mix elements of

their various ancestral and affinity-based identities into hybridized and syncretic blends, whose manifestations shift as people move from social context to social context. Together, these approaches to identity management and intercultural interaction demand a more nuanced set of ideas to help explain them. I found the kernel of that theoretical approach in the notion of deep diversity.

Deepening diversity

One way to look at diversity is to gaze at the past, framing identities around national ancestral categories, mourning the loss of tradition amidst globalization. In this framework, each generation beyond the actual act of immigration is homogenized into an amorphous whole. This melting pot metaphor is rife with a priori assumptions about the dynamism, or lack thereof, of local cultures. Silicon Valley, because of the historic circumstances of agrarian and high-technology global demographic flows, is an experimental site for deep diversity. It in within this framework of deep diversity, and the deep toleration that accompanies it, that new culture is created.

Deep diversity and deep toleration, as conceptual anthropological tools, grant a broader range of polities than that originally conceived by Taylor. He was concerned for the integrity of Canada, a nation-state. However, there is no reason why we cannot apply the lens of this notion to other political units – cities, regions, transnational groups of nations. Nor is there any absolute requirement that the basis of community be political, not based on some other social structure entirely. Deep diversity can be an analytical tool applied to families, schools, or whole regions. Silicon Valley is an example of a cultural entity that is not even an administrative unit, although it sometimes functions as a political economic force. Given its global interaction, it not even confined to one country.

The notion provides for reworking and multiplying connections, even intensifying them (Geertz 2000: 224, 247). Deep diversity is not a theoretical framework that pushes an a priori commitment to either totalizing global homogenization or unfettered chaos. Instead, the apparent lack of common ground, the chaos, implied by diversity is pushed to the background of interactions. New possibilities emerge as hybridization and creativity create the potential for new social contracts. Those new commonalities move to the foreground of social interaction. The concept posits both the creation of commons and constant creative differentiation. When Taylor devised his vision, it was as a political philosopher, critiquing the political infrastructure of Canada to highlight a possible future in which diversity could flower. Geertz, as an anthropologist informed as much by philosophy as anthropology, saw it as a model that could help anthropologists describe existing globalization using a 'pre-theoretical commitment' to the value of cultural complexity.

Charles Taylor has labored to conceptualize global differences, as experienced within a multicultural state polity so that some sort of stability can be achieved. He calls this condition deep diversity. Three facets distinguish deep diversity from its normative and somewhat shallow form. First, this form of diversity recognizes

that the practices of diversity are not superficial but reflect deeply held beliefs about relationships, family, power and governmentality. Deep diversity at its core posits that complex differences exist, whole structures of meaning may separate people, and that people must actively engage in creating new commons for the basis of community. Some of that negotiation requires the creation of new identity categories. Second, deep diversity is complex, existing in shifting global urban landscapes that embrace dozens, if not hundreds, of interacting identities based on ancestry and affiliation. Third, the search for a joint identity commons will be influenced by existing structures of power. However, it is important to understand that those structures are in constant flux, being renegotiated as the political ethnoscape shifts.

Charles Taylor's understanding of deep diversity is philosophical; he is basing his proposition for political interaction on reasoning through the particular historical case of French and 'aboriginal' separatism in Canada. He is not utopian in his optimism. Taylor recognizes that it will be difficult to fashion a culturally meaningful commons that would allow deep diversity to be a productive basis for a polity. However, as scholars of his work have pointed out, his assumptions about politics, particularly identity politics, are deeply rooted in a European and North American understanding. By placing the emphasis on deep diversity, relationships are structurally centrifugal, emphasizing difference and making the creation of an identity commons difficult. Moreover, Taylor has a deeply held position that instrumentality and utilitarian impulses – the glue for relationships not based on a common identity – form a poor basis for creating a cultural commons (Redhead 1999: 206). Such motives are insufficient, in his estimation, for creating a foundation for enduring communication. He finds deep diversity incompatible with the market forces and bureaucratic structures found in contemporary democracy unless a common good beyond the individual can be negotiated out of the diverse positions (Redhead 2002a: 9). However, these are precisely the conditions that describe deep diversity in Silicon Valley.

Cultural relativism for the masses

Coupled with the notion of deep diversity is the idea of deep toleration, a form of cultural competence in which people consciously grapple with cultural differences. In Taylor's view, one is meaningfully oneself only as part of a social web 'among other selves'. Deep toleration does not mean equal or unquestioning affirmation of all possible positions, nor does it mean privatizing difference so that it is hidden and out of view. Instead, it means striving to find a common 'horizon of significance' to permit more comprehensive understandings of others (Elshtain 2004: 131, 136–7). Emphasizing deep toleration is more centripetal, pulling together support for the creation of commons. Particularly under the social conditions of deep diversity, at the nexus of global flows, this promotes a 'cosmopolitan viewpoint rooting individuals . . . to an intercultural dynamic of cultural exchange' (Redhead 1999: 279).

It is no surprise that Taylor's deep diversity comes to anthropology through Clifford Geertz. The assumption of embodied knowledge, the creation of webs of meaning, and the moral support of humanistic values of democratic choice are the Hegelian hermeneutic common ground. However, deep toleration should seem even more familiar to American anthropologists. At its heart, it harkens back to a specific form of cultural relativism, in which knowledge 'evaluations are relative to the cultural background out of which they arise' (Hatch 1983: 3–5). Cultural relativism has had many forms, unfortunately referenced by the same two words. It involves the suspension of judgment during inquiry, understanding that applying rapid and ethnocentric judgments about another's practices and beliefs fundamentally undermines anthropological understanding. Although some would have it so, cultural relativism is not necessarily ethical relativism in which no judgment can ever be rendered. In a nuanced argument Elvin Hatch posits that while there are indeed no absolute or universal moral codes by which to judge, the 'application of the humanistic principle to create an ethic of tolerance without rampant moral relativism' allows anthropologists to retain the greatest assets of cultural relativism without engaging in moral evasion (1983: 138). Such 'humanism' is not a given, or specific to a particular culture, but is an affirmation of the dignity of human agency, 'according people the freedom to be themselves', a common ground whose particulars must be negotiated (Taylor 1993: 183–4). In this, we see an echo of the 'horizon of significance' referenced by Taylor. People can negotiate their own new commons, new guideposts, that encompass multiple differences. This process uses deep toleration, 'without the flaws of extreme relativism that come with the necessity of validation' (Elshtain 2004: 137). Instead, a person can be 'open to the possibility that the contrasting moral sources might offer a better language of self-interpretation than the moral sources one presently relies upon' (Redhead 2002b: 816). Such a position involves willingness to experiment with one's self, one's practices and one's moral narratives. Deep toleration is cultural relativism for the masses.

Deep toleration poses challenges for anthropologists, as well as the communities we study. Power is still a real part of the negotiation for achieving a common good; it would be naive to think otherwise. The Silicon Valley cities of Cupertino and Palo Alto established elementary school level Chinese-immersion programs because of the economic power of Mandarin speakers. The power of the local Chinese community made that option viable, if contested (see English-Lueck et al. 2003). However, when 14-year-old Kim says she likes Chinese music because her family watches Chinese music dubbed in Vietnamese, or Japanese music from anime, she is revealing differences in cultural authority. China and Japan have massive media infrastructures with tremendous global reach; Vietnam does not. Nonetheless, the acknowledgment of that power differential should not diminish Kim's right to negotiate something new, a sense of self situated in Asian California, which defines her search for a new commons.

It is particularly instructive to look at Silicon Valley youth growing to consciousness under the conditions of deep diversity, who are redefining what

philosophers might refer to as their 'horizons of significance', their sense of self-meaning, beyond the categories into which they have been placed. They are not part of the airplane-flying cosmopolitan transnational elite, but they are daily exposed to multiple ways of being human (see Louie 2000). These Silicon Valley youth are not unique in the region in their practice of deep toleration; the birthplace of such practices is probably the high-tech workplace, and ripples extend into the surrounding service sector. Middle-class workers, high and low, demonstrate such intercultural sufferance, and their children are thus enculturated. However, the youth have embraced this ethos of tolerance and transformed it with new practices that challenge received identity categories. As anthropologists have long known, it is difficult to accept received categories of ethnicity while viewing the processes of ethnic identity as 'negotiable' (Stern 2005). Although still influenced by class, caste and clique, teenagers in Silicon Valley are creating a distinctive set of values that comes close to enacting deep toleration. The experimental ethos of Silicon Valley, which goes well beyond the populations directly involved in high-technology work, creates a distinctive context for deep diversity to thrive.

Deep toleration is reflected in Jenet's comments about identity and interaction. Her comments reflect widely held positions I encountered in doing fieldwork with Silicon Valley youth, from a variety of class and ethnic backgrounds, and indicate the overlay of 'Silicon Valley culture'. She reluctantly identifies herself using the epithet 'Chinese-American'. This 17-year-old student is active in the high school diversity club, STAND, and in GSA (Gay Straight Alliance), occasionally attending events at the Billy DeFrank Center for education related to gender identity. She participates in International Relations (a model United Nations), and she has also attended workshops at San Jose State University. Jenet tutors three days a week at her high school. Jenet is passionate about human rights, but also a self-professed Japanese anime addict, a 'blend of American and Chinese' culture. She goes beyond Mr Jeffries' statement that classifying people is difficult, to reject the notion. She decries: 'Checking race/ethnicity is like, garbage. . . I just keep going as I am now, just keep growing and learning and meeting people, experiencing new things and just kind of developing, thinking, beliefs. . . I guess as long as I keep growing and not just stay stagnant, stay put, stuck. . . flattened under a piece of paper like a flower forever, then I think I'd be okay. Cause everybody really needs to change and grow.'

In using deep diversity as a conceptual lever for understanding globalization, we must be aware of power but not overly taken with it. Deep toleration requires strict mental and ethical discipline, suspending judgment while not relinquishing the possibility of a considered moral decision. As a political philosophy, deep tolerance requires close listening to other views, and thoughtful reflection, not automatic affirmation. Cultural relativism, as an epistemological discipline for ethnographers, depends on walking a similarly difficult path.

Taylor's political theories are among the few that do not privilege the majority, often a disguised synonym for the dominant ethnicity, without setting the conceptual stage for centrifugal balkanization. His is a struggle to recognize the value and dignity of difference, while not generating a polity prone to fragmentation.

Figure 1. This poster fostering intercultural tolerance adorns secondary schools throughout Santa Clara County. By permission of the Santa Clara Network for a Hate-Free Community.

However, his vision rests on the co-creation of a common social and political good, a mutual referential framework. His articulation of a political commons can be made more complex, more suitable for discussions of globalization, by applying deep tolerance. Anthropologists often indulge themselves in philosophy, but do so armed with data. By populating the notion of deep diversity with examples drawn from the experience of living people, we can provide tools for political theorists to act with more nuance and fewer a priori assumptions.

Optimistic even when the volatile technology economy is down, Silicon Valley's self-created commons is based on an ethos of experimentation and productivity. While Taylor abhors the shallowness of instrumentality, Silicon Valley has made instrumentality, in its various forms, into a virtue. Pragmatism is the reason people are willing to suspend their judgment about cultural differences and work with others. Silicon Valley people value work, for it is their raison d'etre for being there. Their work ethic is based both on mastery and creating disruptive technologies, ways of doing things that are not simply copies of other approaches. The diversity of Silicon Valley contributes to that innovation. When differences are based on linguistics and culture, and people can bring genuinely different points of view to bear on problems, economic productivity is demonstrably enhanced (Alesina and La Ferrara 2005). Problem-solving itself becomes the common ground for mediating differences. People view their daily encounters with diversity as calisthenics for tolerance, creativity and self-reflection, necessary prerequisites for innovation (English-Lueck 2002, 2010).

Silicon Valley's fascination with work, productivity, and creativity becomes a cultural commons – a mutually beneficial social contract that can allow differences

to flourish, but not overwhelm. Although this contract does not include everyone – significant portions of the population do not view meritocracy as a concept that applies to them – those who do embrace it illustrate effective deep diversity. Deep diversity provides an explanatory model for Silicon Valley in ways that Charles Taylor never intended. Deep toleration describes a set of practices that provide a hint at how balkanization can be side-stepped. The example of Silicon Valley's deep diversity poses challenges for anthropologists to consider the social dynamics of the regions they study. Can the distinctive context of Silicon Valley be duplicated elsewhere? What are the conditions by which simple diversity is converted into deep diversity? What are the constraints to internalizing deep toleration? Applying Taylor's concepts allowed me to rework my inductive ethnographic craft in light of a distinctive analytical framework. In that moment, the ethnographic observations broadened and expanded the original theoretical framework of deep diversity and it left the domain of political philosophy to become anthropological theory.

Acknowledgements

Note

1. Data used in this article are from four ethnographic projects housed under the umbrella of the Silicon Valley Cultures Project during the 1998–2010 period. The first is the Work, Identity and Community project, partially funded by the National Science (see English-Lueck 2002). In this project, 175 workers were given multiple in-situ interviews in their homes and work spaces. The second is a collaborative project done with the Institute for the Future to understand the global reach of youth in Silicon Valley, London, Tokyo, Stockholm and Helsinki. In Silicon Valley seven networks of teens, including a hub and between two and seven nodes, were shadowed and interviewed (Gorbis 2001). The third is a collaborative project with the Santa Clara County Office of Education's Center for Educational Planning on informal learning networks. Once again, four separate networks, drawn from public, private and alternative high schools, were interviewed and observed in everyday life (English-Lueck et al., 2003). The fourth Sloan-funded project shadowed 14 multiethnic dual-career families in Silicon Valley, employing 2500 hours of observation and interview to parse their complex networks and practices.

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