Chapter 9

The Holon/Parton Theory of the Unit of Culture (or the Meme, and Narreme):
In Science, Media, Entertainment, and the Arts

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ABSTRACT

A universal problem in the disciplines of communication, creativity, philosophy, biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, history, linguistics, information science, cultural studies, literature, media and other domains of knowledge in both the arts and sciences has been the definition of 'culture' (see Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Baldwin et al., 2006), including the specification of 'the unit of culture', and, mechanisms of culture. This chapter proposes a theory of the unit of culture, or, the 'meme' (Dawkins, 1976; Dennett, 1995; Blackmore, 1999), a unit which is also the narreme (Barthes, 1966), or 'unit of story', or 'unit of narrative'. The holon/parton theory of the unit of culture (Velikovsky, 2014) is a consilient (Wilson, 1998) synthesis of (Koestler, 1964, 1967, 1978) and Feynman (1975, 2005) and also the Evolutionary Systems Theory model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988-2014; Simonton, 1984-2014). This theory of the unit of culture potentially has applications across all creative cultural domains and disciplines in the sciences, arts and communication media.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter proposes a formal structure for the unit of culture, also known as the meme (Dawkins, 1976), namely: the holon/parton (Velikovsky, 2013b), synthesizing concepts from (Koestler 1967) and Feynman (2005).

Previously, an unsolved problem across media, the arts, entertainment and science has been defining 'the unit of culture', resulting in over three hundred varying definitions of culture (Baldwin et al 2006), and no consensus (van Peer et al 2007). Given also that stories (or, narratives) in any media are 'units

of culture', this proposed unit of culture, the holon/parton, also applies to the *narreme*, or, the 'unit of story' namely the whole and its composite parts. This holon/parton structure is suggested for analyzing media, and transmedia, including: movies, novels, television series, videogames, plays, songs, poems, jokes, religions, and also knowledge in science (i.e., scientific ideas, processes, and products).

An Evolutionary Systems Theory approach to Creativity in the discipline of Mass Communication Studies (aka Communication) illuminates why bioculture is structured hierarchically, as a holon/parton, or a holarchy. The aim here is to provide a universal *unit of culture*, spanning communication, the arts and humanities, media, languages and science, in order to facilitate commensurate empirical analyses of culture across disciplines, and also to enable structural, functional and behavioral comparisons between biocultural artifacts, to aid in the tracking and understanding of culture (and, its units) including within Creative Technologies and the Digital Humanities. For example, a better understanding of culture at the genre level may also benefit cultural curators and cultural theorists.

In short, the unit of culture (as: the holon-parton) is a conceptual, theoretical, practical and scientific tool (namely, a piece of creative technology), for identifying and analyzing units within: any - and all - creative media (including films, novels, videogames, television programs, scientific theories, songs, tweets, sentences, words, and so on, namely: any symbol system in culture.) This theoretical tool is thus potentially of direct practical use to anyone who has anything to do with culture: specifically - creators, students, scholars, critics, analysts, academics, practitioners, curators, and audiences. This Evolutionary Systems Theory approach is part of Applied Evolutionary Epistemology (see Gontier 2012), ideally enabling an understanding of the growth and evolution of both biology and culture.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

A long-standing (unsolved, and universal) problem in the disciplines of Communication, Creativity Studies, Philosophy, Biology, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Archaeology, History, Linguistics, Information Science, Mathematics, Cultural Studies, Literature, Media, the Digital Humanities - and other domains and disciplines of knowledge in the arts, media and the sciences - has been the definition of 'culture', including a practical specification of *the unit* of culture. 'Culture' has long been a problematic term as there is currently no consensus across all of the various domains and disciplines on 'culture'. In 1952, 164 extant definitions of culture were extant (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952), and more recently in 2006 the list was extended to over 300 extant definitions (see Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht, & Lindsley, 2006, pp. 139-226). Summarizing the contemporary state of knowledge about the problem of culture in *Muses and Measures: Empirical Research Methods for the Humanities*,[1] van Peer *et al* concluded 'As far as can be seen, there is no consensus on the notion of culture anywhere to be found' (van Peer, Hakemulder, & Zyngier, 2007, p. 30). Similarly, in a recent survey of contemporary knowledge in the domain of Memetics (1976-2009) - a discipline which aims to identify and track 'units of culture' - in the article 'Evolution of Culture, Memetics' in the *Encyclopedia of Complexity and Systems Science,* it is noted that 'The lack of a universally accepted meme definition and the vagueness of meme boundaries… indeed make empirical studies less evident' (Heylighen & Chielens, 2009, p. 3217).

The following proposal for the unit of culture (aka, the meme), and also the narreme (or, the unit of narrative), namely the *holon/parton*, aims to provide a possible solution to these problems, in defining, and/or creating, and/or analyzing culture, and therefore with many multidisciplinary applications.

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