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Anthropology and the Cognitive Sciences

的身影 across the foundational institutions, irreducible to any simpler notions. His argument went as follows. Knowing a left hand to be a left hand and not a right one does not depend on the internal symmetry of parts of the hand—which may be identical for left and right hands. So the identity of these differences must lie in the external frameworks of our naive spatial conception, which give us the regions of front vs back, left vs right, up vs down, based on the planes through the human body. Although one may attempt to reduce notions of left and right to other notions, one will be invariably frustrated: clockwise rotation already embodies a left/right distinction, specification of the cardinal points relies on clockwise rotation from north, the interpretation of maps depends, say, on deciding that the left hand side of the map corresponds to the region on my left. The issues raised by Kant in this paper are still the subject of lively philosophical debate. Kant's ideas about the foundational nature of the left/right distinction receive indirect reinforcement from the anthropological tradition, initiated by Robert Hertz and extended by Rodney Needham, which sees the distinction as the prismatic binary opposition as it were, and thus a cultural universal.

Now let us confront these ideas with Tenejapan concepts and practice. They have compound terms for left-hand and right-hand but without Hertzian associations of 'downhill' and 'uphill'. What makes the difference between mirror-image objects like left-hand s or right-hand s, or to take a simpler case, lower case b and lower case B? The b can be reflected, flipped over in an additional dimension, into the b. Is the same shape or is it different? Our literature considers this distinction to be highly distinctive, but if one looks at ancient writing systems, the majority seems to have been indifferent to the distinction (including early Greek and Mayan scripts). Tenejanos on the whole robustly assert that such mirror-image objects are the same shape. This suggests that there are aspects of shape discrimination that are fundamentally cultural, whatever the universal perceptual underpinnings: mirror-image discrimination, along with left-right sensitivity generally, is something that can be culturally enhanced or culturally diminished. Westerners live in a world of fundamental left-right asymmetries, enforced by our cultural environment of writing, driving, clockwise (or counter-clockwise) turning, reverting meters and knobs, and architectural designs (doors that open inwards to the left, etc). Tenejanos, despite their linguistic preoccupation with shape mentioned at the outset, live in a world (at least traditionally) exhibiting a less invariant left-right axis. Tenejanos, for example, invert mirrors upside down; if you flip a mirror vertically, it is no different from when you flip it horizontally. By contrast, Westerners do not have this distinction to other body parts, they have no spatial terms for left or right regions. They can define the hand by the alone the notion of left or right in the visual field (as in English "to the left of the tree"). Thus they cannot give directives such as "take the downhill path then turn right" or "set the downhill path left then turn right". They can have left and right but in a different frame of reference. They can say "let me see the left hand" or "let me see the right hand". This suggests that there are aspects of spatial preconception that are fundamentally cultural, whatever the universal perceptual underpinnings: mirror-image discrimination, along with left-right sensitivity generally, is something that can be culturally enhanced or culturally diminished. Westerners live in a world of fundamental left-right asymmetries, enforced by our cultural environment of writing, driving, clockwise (or counter-clockwise) turning, reverting meters and knobs, and architectural designs (doors that open inwards to the left, etc). Tenejanos, despite their linguistic preoccupation with shape mentioned at the outset, live in a world (at least traditionally) exhibiting a less invariant left-right axis. Tenejanos, for example, invert mirrors upside down; if you flip a mirror vertically, it is no different from when you flip it horizontally. By contrast, Westerners do not have this
coordinates: canonical orientation seems to have ego facing uphill toward the outside). This is the rest of the cardinal points by clockwise rotation from a designated one. Tenejapa can rotate on "uphill" (South) either way through "across" (indicating differently East or West) to "downhill" (North) and vice versa. This also suggests that Kant was right that developing conceptual distinctions based on handedness yields a fundamental network of interrelated concepts, but the Tenejapa seem to show that one can replace that entire conceptual scheme with another, less anthropocentric one, providing one does so lock, stock and barrel.

One of the special attractions of this research area is that it promises to connect a number of apparently disparate fields, for example the study of sham (in archeology or visual anthropology) and architecture, the study of cosmology and anthropology, and the comparative study of cognition together with anthropological linguistics. It is the belief that the concept of the circumpolar region of our species which is the hallmark of the anthropological perspective, rather than the way things are to be.

The Executive Board of the Society for Psychological Anthropology generated some controversy over this recommendation. It is the SPA Board's position that the proposal for Board composition would ratify an unfortunate situation that has developed over the past 20 years. In keeping with the anthropological perspective, the Board has been marginalized within American sociocultural anthropology. Our proposal does not turn an argument for exclusion of the "traditional" four fields or the new constellation of disciplines dubious on the Board. Our argument is for inclusion. We believe that the SPA should have a guaranteed seat on the new AAA Board.

At the AAA Meeting in November, President-Elect James Peacock was delegated to come to the SPA board in lieu of a proposal. The SPA board, from Vivian Crapanzano and myself, (in this space in the September 1992 AN), would like to hear in detail about what "urban" means outside of anthropological linguistics and in other lower-income enclaves to generate useful photographic evidence to the Board. We welcome the opportunity to observe this discussion in the course of the AAA meeting, Peacock pointed out that our request would have to be considered in the light of the requests of other units for the same guarantee of representation.

We asked on what grounds we should be considered a unique case, especially given the guaranteed representation that we presumably have on the proposed Board through the American Psychological Society?

Our answer lies in what we regard as the key explanatory role of psychological anthropology: that the study of contemporary societies. Despite the apparent ubiquity of capitalisms, urbanism and "postindustrial" technology, there is still a realm that can be defined as "nonurban."

This also brings us to the question of what "urban" means outside of anthropological linguistics and in other lower-income enclaves to generate useful photographic evidence to the Board. We welcome the opportunity to observe this discussion in the course of the AAA meeting, Peacock pointed out that our request would have to be considered in the light of the requests of other units for the same guarantee of representation. We asked on what grounds we should be considered a unique case, especially given the guaranteed representation that we presumably have on the proposed Board through the American Psychological Society.

One of our major challenges is the American Ethnological Society. As large and as broad-spectrum as AES membership is, AES is not conducive to large membership or popular election.

Contemporary sociocultural anthropology is wed to the politics of marginalization and erasure. Surely such a discipline must recognize the effects of these politics within itself and must be willing to redress these effects. As a field, we are intensely concerned with the politics of representation. Surely such a field cannot serenely invoke the theatrical tradition of "four fields" as a rationale for the way things are to be. In her recent Report (in the January 1993 AN) AAA President Annette Weiner has welcomed all comments on the proposed changes. Do we.

Contributions

Please send contributions for this column to the editor, Katherine Ewing, Dept of Cultural Anth, Duke U, Durham, NC 27710; 919/684-3442; fax 919/681-8483.

SOCIETY FOR URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Robert Rosenberg, Contributing Editor

A Letter from SUA President Walter E. Zenner

What's in a Name? In various discussions in the last few years questions about the scope of urban anthropology have come up. In 1991, this happened at the panel "Whither Urban Anthropology?", in which several panelists questioned whether there was anything uniquely urban or if the phenomena which they studied were urban.

More recently, in our dialogue with the membership of the Society for the Anthropology of the United States and Canada, questions about the appropriateness of our name, the Society for Urban Anthropology, came up.

The SAU council has addressed itself to the problem of the evolutionary significance of the urban, since most SUA members deal with contemporary societies. In the course of the discussion, Weil pointed out that our request would have to be considered in the light of the requests of other units for the same guarantee of representation. We asked on what grounds we should be considered a unique case, especially given the guaranteed representation we presumably have on the proposed Board through the American Psychological Society.

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New York Happenings

Judith Frankenberg (Mount Sinai Medical Center) writes to describe two activities of interest to urban anthropologists that took place in New York City recently. The first was an exhibition entitled " говорих Old in Spanish Harlem," held at the Museum of the City of New York, New York City Community Gallery, September 12, 1992, through January 3, 1993. The exhibition featured Frankenberg's research on early Latinas. This research used photographs of the informants taken by the sociologist Edmund J. Dolores Morales as visual frames to generate post-interview responses. Frankenberg also organized a conference at the Museum of the City of New York entitled "The Anthropology of Lower Income Urban Enclaves: The Case of East Harlem," supported in part by the Wenner-Gren Foundation. The conference brought together urban ethnographers who had worked in East Harlem and in other lower-income enclaves to discuss the implications of their work for urban anthropology. Anyone interested in the work of the conference should contact her directly.

A Letter from Constance deRoche, Editor of City & Society

New life was breathed into City and Society by decisions made during the San Francisco meetings. Following the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Membership (as reflected in Kathleen Logan's fall poll), SUA officials are arranging for