

introduction of Buddhism among the Monpas and Sherdukpens.

T. C. Sharma, Gauhati University: Prehistoric archaeology in northeastern India: Its problems and prospects.

## The Anthropology of the Body

by Brenda E. F. Beck

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A unique and interesting conference on the anthropology of the body, sponsored by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth and held in Belfast, Northern Ireland, April 2-5, 1975, gave life to a number of new ideas and issues that are gradually coming to the fore in British social anthropology. The symposium's unusual theme must not be understood, however, to constitute a new expression of interest in physical anthropology. Instead of exploring the physiology of the body, participants were solely concerned with what might be called the "interface" between the body and society. The problems addressed were thus twofold: how do the givens of the human body form constrain or delimit societal variation, and how do they, in equal measure, inspire the elaboration of social or cultural codes? It is important to note here that living forms are characterized by their pliability and constant movement, their shifting coloration, and their multi-textured surfaces. Yet, at the same time, the parameters of such fluctuations are always constrained by certain species-specific givens. The requirements of biological life demand that there be structure: that is, a certain specialized subdivision and patterned, functional inter-relationship of body parts and capabilities. The exploratory discussions at the conference were about the nature of such structural confines. At no point were the grosser problems of inter-species similarities at issue.

For example, the fact that the musculatures of our third and fourth fingers are linked was used to illustrate the existence of a constraint on the range of fingering patterns that may be employed by the player of a stringed instrument. At the same time, the cultural elaboration of strumming rhythms and playing postures in music has exploited the natural flexibility of the human wrist joint. More important than these purely formal bodily features, however, was the stress that all conference participants laid on bodily affect and movement. It was in this context that the convenor (John Blacking), in his opening paper, tried to focus subsequent discussion on our very limited knowledge of human somatic states. This emphasis was intended to provide a counterbalance to the more traditional concern of social anthropologists with mental phenomena. To what extent, then, does human culture rest on the use of iconic, that is, non-verbal and even sub-cognitive, forms of communication? Might these even be the primary building blocks for our elaborate social codes? Such a view is particularly persuasive when we consider how a child first learns about social norms and expectations, or when we stop to study the course of human evolution more generally.

This fundamental fact—that cultural codes organize acting, moving bodies—was evident in one of the first papers presented, an essay describing a medical student's first experience of the dissection of a corpse. This dissection experience is one that Western medical tradition has been at pains to separate completely from the realm of ordinary social attitudes and responses. At a dissection the body must be defined as lifeless. Thus its presence gives rise to medical terms and procedures designed to distance it from the affect associated with normal

interaction experience. This paper made it clear that our concept of humanness is, in large part, a product of the intrinsic liveliness of our body form. Similarly illustrative of boundary themes was a paper treating a tribal dance from Iran. Here is a case where participants expressly utilize movement in order to merge the body with a cosmic construct. Like the loss of self through total stasis (death), here was a similar loss of self through a merger-in-movement with structures not otherwise a part of the everyday bodily condition.

The papers of the other contributors also stressed these self/non-self interaction processes by examining attitudes towards the body as a purchased object (prostitution), as a malfunctioning entity (illness or madness), as a katabolic mechanism (defecation), and as something energized by its own internal moods (facial expression, hand movements, dance) or manipulated by some external force (sorcery or trance). The problem of universal mental structures (logical patterns, cognition) was also discussed by several participants. Still other papers provided ethnographic examples of how extensively the collective representations of some cultures utilize these universals of human form.

On the whole it seemed that the conference discussions were concerned to stress this interface between biologically structured and culturally learned behavior. However, there was no clear agreement about how to conceptualize the clear overlap between these verbal and non-verbal communications modes. Thus there was much uninspired debate as to whether to speak of simple bodily extensions of emotive or animative force or of the intended (or unintended) communication function of such extensions. It is clear that such a concept of a body/mind dichotomy comes down to us via a long Indo-European intellectual heritage. What role might this ghost play in defining the very terms with which anthropologists approach this behavior/communication debate? It was disappointing that this issue, around which the convenor focused his opening talk, was not taken up more vigorously in discussion. Within the field of communication participants were also unsure about how to deal with another very important issue, that of drama or pretense.

Despite the diversity of papers and viewpoints presented, it can be said, however, that these discussions did confirm the existence of a common field of problems. Of these, three issues deserve special mention. First, those present appeared to agree that social anthropologists must give the facts of shifting somatic states and of their expression in bodily form increased importance in their efforts to understand the functioning of social structures and codes. Second, it was generally felt that more work must be focused on the qualitative processes of interaction, as these serve both as a foundation and as a constant reinforcement for collective constructs. Finally, there was apparent agreement about the fact that symbolic and social systems become more intelligible when it is recognized that they continually utilize the restricted, yet extremely rich, set of metaphorical possibilities which the body provides.

The conference was attended by a wide range of people from several continents and many disciplinary backgrounds. It was both stimulating and frustrating, as any good conference which attempts to struggle with fundamental issues in a discipline should be.

## On *Paranthropus* and "Relic Hominoids"

by Gordon Strassenburgh

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Bayanov and Bourtsev, in their reply to comments on Porshnev's article "The Troglodytidae and the Hominidae in the

Taxonomy and Evolution of Higher Primates" (CA 15:452-56), say, "Orthodox primatology . . . apparently . . . has no clues for analyzing the evidence of the continued existence on earth of higher primate forms distinct from both the Pongidae and *H. sapiens*." That is simply not true. Robinson's (1956) *Paranthropus* theory, in its essence, proposes that there was a hominid distinct from, and appreciably larger than, its contemporary, *Homo*, in Africa and Asia. The *Paranthropus* theory, I believe, can be judged highly successful in a predictive sense in light of continuing finds of robust and gracile hominid fossils in Africa over a four-million-year period. Given that span of existence, *Paranthropus* may be judged a successful genus. The data which have been amassed on the unknown hominid my Russian colleagues refer to as a "relic hominoid" attest to the similarity between it and *Paranthropus* in every particular which can be compared. Those under the impression that the supposed extinction of *Paranthropus* has any valid theoretical or evidential basis would do well to reexamine the question. In other words, the survival of *Paranthropus* is completely consistent with an "orthodox version" of hominid history. How long will this be "quietly ignored" by the majorities on both sides of the question?

[The above comment was sent to Dmitri Bayonov and Igor Bourtsev for possible reply. — EDITOR.]

### Reference Cited

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## On Action Anthropology and the Southern Cheyenne

by W. L. Partridge

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Does Schlesier (CA 15:277-83) realize that by his actions he has given support to only one political faction among the Cheyenne, and through those actions implicitly rejected other factions? And is this not "interference"? The truth is that there is no action without choice between the factions naturally constituting any human community. Schlesier has given readers a false impression, for not all Cheyenne are traditionalists. What of the Baptists, the Native American Church people, the veterans, the militant young people's groups, et al.? Schlesier ignores these because *he* values traditional Cheyenne religion. That is political interference.

### Reply

by Karl H. Schlesier

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Partridge is much mistaken in viewing my engagement as supportive of one political faction among the Southern Cheyenne. The traditional leaders I am associated with are *not* a

faction: they represent the totality of Cheyenne culture as a unique and enduring system that extends from prehistory into the present. I have tried to emphasize this simple fact in two papers (Schlesier 1974a, b), but seem to be unable to penetrate the armor of ethnocentric bias in which some of my colleagues are dressed. Perhaps I should propose a parable that Partridge might understand.

Let us suppose that the United States were invaded by a foreign power and conquered after decades of bitter warfare, famine, and disastrous epidemics of new diseases. Let us suppose that the survivors, reduced to one-sixth or less of the 1970 population, were made wards and confined to a restricted territory while the bulk of U.S. lands were taken by the victors. Let us suppose that the new dominant society, over a period of 100 years, used varying degrees of force to abolish the defeated U.S. cultural system of the 1970s, punished cultural resistance, strongly promoted assimilation through relocation, and manipulated the oppressed through a government-directed "self-government" manned by more or less assimilated U.S. natives who tried their best to break "traditional U.S. culture." Let us suppose that "social scientists" belonging to the new dominant society, after studying the victims and their despair with the cool interest of entomologists, advised them that U.S. culture of the 1970s was inadequate in the 2080s and that they should reinterpret themselves in terms of the goals promoted by the dominant society, suggesting economic advancement and "acceptance" if they did so.

Let us now suppose that a "U.S. traditional government" was still active, but underground, in the restricted territory and that it asked help of a "social scientist" who seemed a bit more human and less an entomologist than others. Let us suppose that the oppressed U.S. culture of the 2080s was still functioning despite all punishment, as the oppressed Cheyenne culture is in the 1970s. How would the U.S. traditionalists convince him that they, not the government stoolies, were the keepers of their people's past and future? They probably would point to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights of the 18th century and explain to him the teachings of their culture heroes Jefferson, Washington, and others, upon whose fortitude, philosophical depth, and judicial excellence their nation, their institutions, and their old way of life were founded. Would the prospective action anthropologist help them in their quest to reunite their people as a sane population upon the foundation of the ancient documents and teachings, against the overwhelming power of the dominant alien society? If he did, he would, according to Partridge, surely interfere politically—but politically in terms of the dominant society, *not* in terms of the host population!

The success of the traditional leaders in the parable of the 2080s as well as under the cold skies of Oklahoma in the 1970s depends *not* upon them, but upon the dominant society's willingness to permit men (and women) to be truly free, to let them arrange their lives in freedom and be masters of their own destinies, not against others, but alongside others.

My parable could be carried much farther and could be more finely honed. From my rough draft, however, the understanding should finally emerge that Cheyenne traditional leaders, as priests of the sacred ceremonies, as members of the council of chiefs, and as headmen of the five soldier societies grouped under the protection of the Arrow Keeper, guardian of the sacred bundles, *are* the persisting Cheyenne tribal government, not a faction. Nontraditional factions exist, no doubt, and I know them well, but I grant them the same minor position here that I would grant such factions in the parable. I believe that, once the real tribal government becomes firm, the nontraditional factions will wither away, some individuals to be lost to Cheyenne culture forever, the majority to redeem themselves the Cheyenne way, learning how to cope with being Cheyenne in a white-dominated world. Jorgensen's (1972) insightful description of the Ute and Shoshoni Sun Dance community suggests how it will happen. Although discriminated against for