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"Included in the Present Classification": Notes Toward an Archaeology of Ethnographic Categorization

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CLIO'S FANCY: DOCUMENTS TO PIQUE THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

"Included in the present classification": Notes toward an Archeology of Ethnographic Categorization

In the 1930s, during the later phases of Boasian diffusionism, when the mainline of American anthropology had moved toward cultural holism, culture and personality, and acculturation, students and colleagues of Alfred Kroeber went into the field armed with the "laundry lists" of the California Culture Element Distribution project (cf. Driver 1962). The results of such studies produced tables in which traits were marked by their presence (x) or their absence (-), from which the following is a less than random selection:

- 1085. Swimming, breast stroke
- 1086. Swimming, dog fashion
- 1087. Swimming, on back
- 1088. Swimming, crawl (overhead reaching)
- 1089. Males urinate squatting
- 1090. First marital intercourse anal
- 1091. "Toilet chips" [for wiping]
- 1092. Women sit cross-legged (Turkish)
- 1093. Women kneel on knees and toes, buttocks on heels
- 1094. Women sit with 1 foot under, other at side

Reading for the first time the culminating entries from E. W. Gifford's trait list for the various bands of the Pomo (Kroeber et al. 1939), I recalled the category-shattering laughter of Michel Foucault, in the opening lines of The Order of Things, upon his first reading of Borges' imaginary Chinese encyclopedia, which divided animals into:

- a) belonging to the Emperor
- b) embalmed
- c) tame
- d) sucking pigs
- e) sirens
- f) fabulous
- g) stray dogs
- h) included in the present classification
- i) frenzied
- j) innumerable
- k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush
- l) et cetera
- m) having just broken the water pitcher
- n) that from a long way off look like flies

What implicit system of cultural or ethnographic categorization could possibly account for this strange juxtaposition of behaviors: swimming, pissing, fucking, shitting, sitting? At the most immediate level, the heading gave a ready answer: "Postures and Actions." But why in a list of over a thousand

items should these ten come last? Were the same or similar items included in all the Kroeberian "laundry lists"? Were there perhaps underlying principles to be found in the ethnographic categories of other anthropologists or schools? Would these be the same at different moments in the history of anthropology? Was there, in effect, a kind of deep categorical structure to the European ethnographic experience generally? My wonderment encouraged a research foray (carried on, I should say, in large part by my research assistant Andrea Lee-Harshbarger, and fortuitously supplemented by the bachelor's thesis of Daniel Turner on the ethnographic categories used by James Cook and Joseph Banks on the voyage of the Endeavour in the years 1768-1771).

A comparison of the other trait listings in volume thirty-seven of the University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology (1939) quickly revealed that the "laundry lists" were not all the same--that for the Yana containing only half as many items. And, as Kroeber suggested, the discrepancy was motivated: "Our element lists are not a 'Notes and Queries,' that is, an unlocalized universal-pattern collection of memoranda and instructions for government officials, missionaries, and ethnographic amateurs or novices. They are derived from a thirty-year accumulation, by many participants, of ethnographic knowledge of one area, obtained by ethnographic fieldwork of orthodox type." Kroeber went on to suggest that "each region studied requires a list of its own based on previously acquired knowledge of its cultures." (72) Discussing the methodology of Stanislaw Klimek's statistical analysis of the distribution material (cf Golbeck 1980), Kroeber specified three criteria that must be met in deciding whether the "elements operated with are justifiable units": "First, the elements must be sharply definable. Second, they must be derived empirically, not logically. And third, they must be accepted for use without bias or selection" (1).

Elsewhere in the volume, Kroeber indicated how the lists evolved. They began with "a list of eight hundred culture traits or elements occurring in native California" which he himself compiled in 1928 (but apparently never published as such) for the study that eventually appeared as Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America (1939). In preparing a "more accurate list" suitable for statistical study, Klimek "shrank" Kroeber's "rough" list by half--after which "Gifford and others" expanded the list "as a basis for new systematic field inquiry" (123; cf. 72).

Although quite disparate in length, the lists were not, of course, totally lacking in structure. As the "Postures and Actions" heading suggests, specific traits were grouped under headings, which may be compared as follows (and in several instances have been abbreviated):

Klimek	Yana	Pomo
Pottery	Dress & Adornment	Clothing
Basketry	Cradles	Hair
Food & Agriculture	Burdens	Adornment
Dress & Ornament	Basketry (twined)	Ceremonial Dress
Smoking	Basketry (coiled)	Cradles & Burdens
Musical Instruments	Basketry (various)	Basketry
Games	Cordage	Cordage
Money	Fishing	Fishing
Tools & Implements	Hunting	Hunting
Hunting & Fishing	Skin Dressing	Food
Boats	Food Habits	Utensils
Structures	Var. Food Utensils	Tools
War & Fighting	Utensils, Implems.	Weapons
Social Insts.	Weapons	Assembly House
Death & Mourning	Assembly House	Dwelling House
Shamanism	Dwelling House	Sweat House
Puberty Rites, etc.	Sweat House	Navigation
Kuksu & Hesi Cmplx.	Navigation	Ceremonial Stones
Tolache Cult	Musical Instrms.	Musical Instrms.
Cerems. & Dances	Money	Money & Beads
[Misc.] Beliefs & Artifacts	Pipes & Tobacco	Pipes & Tobacco
	Games	Games
	Calendar, etc.	Calendar, etc.
	Marriage	Marriage
	Birth	Birth
	Puberty	Puberty
	Death	Death
	Social Status	Soc. & Polit. Status
	Polit. Org.	Chiefs
	Property	Land Ownership
	Warfare	War
	Shamans	Shamans
	Cures, Magic	Souls & Ghosts
	Ritual	Mythology
	Mythology	Ritual
	Miscellaneous	Ghost Society
		Kuksu Society
		Varia
		Postures and Actions

One striking aspect of these lists is the clear relationship to a museum-based, object-oriented anthropology--in which clothing and basketry have pride of place, and bulk much larger quantitatively (in terms of the number of distinct elements under each heading) than many sociological or ritual aspects of culture. Kroeber, of course, had strong connections to museological anthropology, and was inclined to minimize the more sociological aspects of the discipline. One notes also that, despite Kroeber's appeal to induction, there is an order in the sequence of categories: from subsistence to life cycle to social organization to religious belief--in general, that is, from the material to the ideal.

Since by implication Kroeber himself referred to other systems of ethnographic classification, one is inclined to make a few brief comparisons, to see what if any commonalities there may be among them. "Notes and Queries," of course, referred to the ethnographic manuals prepared by committees of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The first edition (1874), in which E. B. Tylor played the major role, was divided into three major sections: The Constitution of Man; Culture; Miscellaneous. The seventy-five headings devoted to "Culture" began with "history," and moved from there to archaeology, etymology, astronomy, arithmetic, medicine, food, cannibalism, narcotics, crimes, morals, covenants, religion, superstitions, magic and witchcraft, mythology, government, laws, customs, taboo, property, trade, money, measures, war, hunting, nomadism, pastoralism, agriculture, domestication of animals, slavery, social relations, marital relations, relationships, widows, infanticide, limitation of population, education, initiatory ceremonies, games, communications, tattooing, clothing, personal ornaments, burials, deformations, tribal marks, circumcision, totems, dyeing, music, language, poetry, writing, drawing, ornamentation, machinery, navigation, habitations, fire, string, weaving, pottery, leatherwork, basketwork, stone implements, metallurgy, arts and manufacturers, memorial structures, engineering, topography, swimming, natural forms, conservatism, variation, invention.

While there is no apparent systematic logic to this listing, the contrast between its sequence and that of Kroeber's "laundry lists" is striking. Already author of a work on Primitive Culture (1871) in its more ideal manifestations--but not yet the Keeper of the University Museum at Oxford--Tylor started with modes of knowledge and belief, moved then to social and economic organization, and relegated the clearly "collectible" manifestations of material culture to the very end.

Interestingly enough, however, this reversal of the material to ideal sequence was not to persist in Notes and Queries. In later editions, the order was changed, and by 1912, the movement was from "physical anthropology" to "technology" to "sociology" to "arts and sciences" (including language, fine art, stories, music, dancing, drama, games and amusements, reckoning and measurement, money and other measurements of value, natural science, religion, and "adopted elements in culture: importation, imitation, teaching"). The sequence was from mankind as physical being to technology to social organization to belief systems--i.e., once again, from the physical and the material to the ideal.

The second system of classification to which Kroeber indirectly referred was that of Clark Wissler, who in 1923 had devoted the fifth chapter of his influential book on Man and Culture to "The Universal Pattern." There Wissler

suggested that "students of cultures find that the same general outline will fit them all: thus, we may say the facts of culture may be comprehended under nine heads as in the accompanying table":

The Culture Scheme

1. Speech
Languages, writing systems, etc.
2. Material Traits
 - a. Food Habits
 - b. Shelter
 - c. Transportation and Travel
 - d. Dress
 - e. Utensils, tools, etc.
 - f. Weapons
 - g. Occupations and industries
3. Art. Carving, painting, drawing, music, etc.
4. Mythology and Scientific Knowledge
5. Religious Practices
 - a. Ritualistic forms
 - b. Treatment of the Sick
 - c. Treatment of the dead
6. Family and Social Systems
 - a. The forms of marriage
 - b. Methods of reckoning relationship
 - c. Inheritance
 - d. Social control
 - e. Sports and games
7. Property
 - a. Real and personal
 - b. Standards of value and exchange
 - c. Trade
8. Government
 - a. Political forms
 - b. Judicial and legal procedures
9. War

(Wissler 1923:74)

In the aftermath of the Great War, "War" was by implication given a terminal categorical prominence. Insofar as Wissler offered explicit justification for the sequence, however, it would seem to have been in implicitly evolutionary terms, in which the movement was from the animal to the individual to the social: the priority of speech was argued on the grounds that "one can scarcely conceive of an animal community without some degree of communication" (81); tools--conceived as "material constructs both to supplement and protect the individual"--were "so universal that man has been defined as the tool-using animal" (89); from there Wissler turned to "relations of individuals within the group and around these functions, what is spoken of as social organization"--leaving the rest of the categories unremarked.

Wissler's "universal pattern" was one of three "most

promising" prior classificatory schemes consulted in establishing the one developed by George Murdock and his colleagues at the Yale Institute of Human Relations in the late 1930s to serve as the organizing principle of the "Cross-Cultural Survey" (which in 1949 eventuated in the Human Relations Area Files). In the event, however, Wissler's (along with that of Yale's William Graham Sumner and A. G. Keller, as well as their prior source in Herbert Spencer's Descriptive Sociology) "did not seem adequate or comprehensive enough," and a new "Outline of Cultural Materials" was created (Ford 1971:177-78). Its goal was "to provide a consistent system of classification that would permit the ordering of information on man's various environments--including climate, geography and topography, flora, and fauna as well as the physical, social, and behavioral characteristics of a people, their beliefs, value systems, religion and philosophy" (176).

Although that retrospective comment itself suggests that there were in fact implicit prior assumptions about the proper ordering of ethnographic data, it is worth noting certain moments in the development of the HRAF schema. According to its historian, elaborating "the reproductive cycle" was relatively easy, since "the biological aspects of reproduction provided convenient categories" around which "ethnographers tend to organize their information" (Ford 1971:178). But an attempt to develop a "logical system" for material culture broke down when confronted by the actual content of existing ethnographies. The lesson "that was learned was that for technology and material culture"--and for "nearly every part of the outline that was eventually produced"--the "mode of its construction had to be an inductive process." Rather than developing a priori "a logical scheme," it became necessary to examine comprehensively the way in which "ethnographers and other observers [actually] tended to group descriptive information." Categories "based on contemporary theory had to be abandoned in favor of inductively perceived methods of existing classification." It was only in relation to "social and kin groupings and organization"--the privileged theoretical categories of the Murdockian project--that "a series of analytic distinctions had to be made and defined," due to the "lack of consistent usage on the part of ethnographers and other observers in the field. . . ." (181-82).

The resulting schema included 88 major headings:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 10 Orientation | 16 Demography |
| 11 Bibliography | 17 History & Culture Change |
| 12 Methodology | 18 Total Culture |
| 13 Geography | 19 Language |
| 14 Human Biology | 20 Communication |
| 15 Behavior Processes
& Personality | 21 Records |
| | 22 Food Quest |

23 Animal Husbandry	55 Individuation & Mobility
24 Agriculture	56 Social Stratification
25 Food Processing	57 Interpersonal Relations
26 Food Consumption	58 Marriage
27 Drink, Drugs, Indulgence	59 Family
28 Leather, Textiles, Fabric	60 Kinship
29 Clothing	61 Kin Groups
30 Adornment	62 Community
31 Exploitative Activities	63 Territorial Organization
32 Processing Basic Materials	64 State
33 Building & Construction	65 Government Activities
34 Structures	66 Political Behavior
35 Equipment & Maintenance of Buildings	67 Law
36 Settlements	68 Offenses & Sanctions
37 Energy and Power	69 Justice
38 Chemical Industries	70 Armed Forces
39 Capital Goods Industries	71 Military Technology
40 Machines	72 War
41 Tools and Appliances	73 Social Problems
42 Property	74 Health & Welfare
43 Exchange	75 Sickness
44 Marketing	76 Death
45 Finance	77 Religious Beliefs
46 Labor	78 Religious Practices
47 Business & Industrial Organization	79 Ecclesiastical Organization
48 Travel & Transportation	80 Numbers & Measures
49 Land Transport	81 Exact Knowledge
50 Water & Air Transport	82 Ideas about Nature & Man
51 Living Standards & Routines	83 Sex
52 Recreation	84 Reproduction
53 Fine Arts	85 Infancy & Childhood
54 Entertainment	86 Socialization
	87 Education
	88 Adolescence, Adulthood & Old Age

(Murdock et al 1950:3-9)

Again, one notes certain categorical priorities specific to this particular system of classification. In a somewhat different and more pervasive way than with Wissler's "universal pattern," warfare seems to have been privileged--inasmuch as the whole effort (which was in fact supported by the Department of the Navy) was geared, as the category labels suggest, to the analysis of economically and technologically advanced societies. One notes also the special placement of life cycle phenomena at the end, where by implication they suggest a reiterative circularity to the whole cultural scheme. However, there is enough similarity between this scheme and several others treated so far to suggest an underlying framework of assumption. Insofar as one takes the first as foremost, it would seem that at the level of ethnographic classification, if not that of anthropological theorizing, there is a certain materialist, one might even

say "technoenvironmental determinist," bias built into western anthropological thought.

But if this would seem, at the level of ethnographic classification, to qualify Marvin Harris' critique of The Rise of Anthropological Theory (1968), it seems quite unlikely that there has been a pervasive but unacknowledged debt to Karl Marx. The roots of the priority of the material go back long before Marx--and are linked, one suspects, to a teleological privileging of the ideal (as Marx himself might have argued). A recent look at the categories employed by Joseph Banks and Captain Cook on the first of the latter's three expeditions to Southern Seas between 1768 and 1771 suggests that the bias was already then manifest. Thus, Banks' account of New Zealand moved through the following topics: terrain, soil, timber, minerals, quadrupeds, birds, insects, fish, plants, population, appearance, hygiene, tattoos, clothing, ornaments, shelter, food, drink, health, boats, tools, textiles, fishing, cultivation of land, arms, war song and dance, cannibalism, forts, civil government, women, religion, burial customs, and language. While there is variation between the schemas adopted at Tierra del Fuego, Tahiti, New Zealand and Australia, as well as between the two observers, the general movement would seem to be from the external to the internal, from the material to the ideal, from the physical to the spiritual, from that which is closer to nature to that which is closer to God, from the individual to the social, from the concrete to the abstract--or, one might suggest, from the actually collectible to the merely recountable.

Whether, as Daniel Turner (1991) suggests, the basis for this schema is to be found in "the Great Chain of Being" seems perhaps moot--since the sequence "quadrupeds, birds, insects, fish, plants" does not correlate with that of the chain (cf. Lovejoy 1936). But it does seem likely that there is a kind of deep patterning (if not structuring) of ethnographic classification in the anthropological tradition, a patterning derivative perhaps from traditions of natural historical inquiry, and of cosmological and religious assumption. More systematic investigation of questionnaires and other such instruments, as well as comparative study of travel accounts and ethnographies (from the point of view of their actual structuring, as opposed to their exemplification of a generalized notion of "ethnographic authority" [cf. Clifford 1983]), might prove a fruitful project. [GWS]

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RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Steve Alter (Department of History, University of Michi-
gan) is starting research for a dissertation on the nine-
teenth century Yale University linguist William Dwight Whit-
ney.

Penny Lee (Department of Education, University of West-
ern Australia) is doing research on the linguistic work of
Benjamin Lee Whorf.

Mary Anne Levine (Department of Anthropology, University
of Massachusetts at Amherst) is working on a manuscript