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Commentaries

Processes of Community Formation

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In a review of my recent book, *The Migration Process* (AA 93:1014–1015, 1991), Kathleen Hall consistently misreads my evidence: for example, she attributes to me wrongly the argument that second-generation Pakistanis forge long-term friendships and business associations with English school peers. In fact, they form such relationships with one another, thereby extending and elaborating *intra-ethnic* networks. Pakistanis in Manchester do not speak different languages or originate from different countries, as she mistakenly claims, although some are refugees from India to Pakistan. As I show (through a variety of maps, network diagrams, and case studies), there are numerous crosscutting ties between Pakistanis belonging to different castes and classes and residing in different neighborhoods. I argue as well, however, for the need to recognize variations in *lifestyle*. Elite Pakistanis in Manchester set, I show, new styles for others to emulate. Different lifestyles, however, are not distinctive cultures, as Hall mistakenly assumes.

Given this misunderstanding of much of the evidence in the book, it is no wonder Hall goes on to accuse me of failing to address issues of “racial and class inequality” (p. 1015) and of reifying “Pakistanis” as a category (p. 1014). The point is that Asian immigrants, including Pakistanis, transcend disadvantages of race and ethnicity through a *dual* process. They encroach competitively into new and more prestigious economic, residential, and political domains. I discuss this process of successful immigrant entrepreneurship in detail in the book, devoting two whole chapters to it. I argue, for example, that unemployment and racism impel immigrants toward such entrepreneurship, and that they draw on intra-ethnic and familial resources in order to compete successfully.

Second, I show that over the past 40 years since they migrated, Pakistanis have established cultural, religious, and economic *centers*

of high value, while they continuously elaborate their intra-ethnic social networks. The community is not a given—it is a multifaceted creation. Moreover, it is not defined by its “boundaries,” but by its central loci of high value.

In stressing ethnic entrepreneurship, my explicit intention was to avoid the usual “victimology” approach dominant in British race relations. According to this approach, immigrants are constituted as passive victims rather than active agents (for a more detailed discussion see Werbner and Anwar 1991).

Economic consolidation is only one among several processes of community *formation* discussed in my book. My aim was to raise and explore certain basic questions: What happens when large numbers of unrelated migrant-strangers from a *shared* background and religion happen to settle in a particular locality; how do they begin to establish themselves and their rights within their newly adopted society; how do they create a “community” with shared images, and a shared “history”; how do they “naturalize” their rituals, and choose their leaders? It is unfortunate that Hall resorts to banal models rather than making an effort to understand the book in its own terms.

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Do Other Cultures Have “Art”?

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Reading or writing about non-Western art can be fun, but reading and writing about *definitions* of art seldom is. Doing so, however, is necessary before getting to the “good stuff.” It has, therefore, unavoidably occupied my attention in the past (cf. Anderson 1979:8–18, 1989:8–17), and I addressed it directly and at length in *Calliope’s Sisters: A Comparative Study*

of *Philosophies of Art* (1990). Reviewers have said favorable things about that book, but three of them have raised the fundamental question, How are we anthropologists to identify, much less discuss, art in non-Western settings? Thus, Kris Hardin places me, more or less correctly, in a camp that “accepts that it is possible to define art in societies without a recognizable category of art” (1991:116). Similarly, Jacques Maquet says, “Presenting ‘art theories’ of groups having in their cultures neither the concept of art, nor a philosophical tradition . . . is not describing existing theories, it is constructing them” (Maquet 1991:967). And, after quoting a passage in which I note that certain qualities (e.g., sensuousness and stylistic conventions) that are found in San and Inuit aesthetic theories “seem inevitably to be present in those things we consider to be art” (Anderson 1990:239), David Ecker asks, “Inevitable to whom? To the San and Inuit or to Anderson?” (Ecker 1991:270).

The question of whose categories should be used, ours or theirs, has bedeviled other areas of cultural anthropology as well, and we who specialize in art anthropology might take heart in realizing that *both* approaches can be useful. But, my acceptance of paradigmatic pluralism notwithstanding, the remarks quoted above prompt me to comment briefly on one method for identifying and talking about non-Western art that yields some interesting and useful insights.

The core issue is the presence or absence in other cultures of art-related terminology and clearly articulated speculative thought. The ethnographic record does contain instances of societies that possess fairly specialized vocabularies for the discussion of art works, as shown by Thompson’s well-known studies (e.g., Thompson 1973) of Yoruba art criticism and Keil’s analysis (1979) of Tiv music terminology. Furthermore, there are clearly places where some individuals discuss in abstract terms the meaning and significance of art, as León-Portilla (1963) has established for the theoreticians whom the Aztecs called *tlamatinime*.

Nevertheless, Hardin and Maquet are correct in their claims that some—perhaps most—languages lack words that translate even approximately as *art*. And by the same token, some—again, probably most—cultures have no tradition of using disinterested, theoretical principles to discuss the relative merits or fundamental nature of art; that is, they have no explicit, clearly articulated aesthetic philosophy. The problem, of course, is that few anthropologists who are interested in art are willing to remain silent about certain material

and behavioral artifacts from such societies, things that some Western writers have called *art* but that might more precisely be termed *art sans theory*.

In their respective publications, Hardin and Maquet have pursued certain strategies in dealing with this dilemma. Hardin calls for a rejection of all Western categories in the description and analysis of non-Western socio-cultural phenomena. In her study of Kono performances, she emphasizes the “aesthetic response” and assumes that this affective state can be identified in non-Western cultures. The event she describes is significant, she feels, not because it exemplifies what English-speakers might call *dance*, but because of its salience in Kono thought, where the “adherence to and successful re-presentation of principles . . . elicits positive aesthetic response. The primary mechanism here is one of redundancy” (1988:37). This opens an interesting door, allowing Hardin to consider how redundancy and the aesthetic response are related in domains of Kono life that fall outside the Western domain of art. Although I remain unclear on some issues (how, for example, do the Kono themselves speak of what Hardin glosses as “aesthetic response,” and do Kono view *any* redundant activity, no matter how commonplace, in terms that significantly link it to what we would consider to be Kono artistry?), Hardin is certainly pursuing intriguing questions.

The aesthetic response is even more central to the work of Maquet (1986). However, as I pointed out some years ago (Anderson 1979:14–17), serious problems arise when an artifact of non-Western provenance is considered to be art only if it provokes an aesthetic response in some individuals. Indeed, the aesthetic response is such an elusive and ephemeral subjective state that its application to even Western fine art has proven to be far from straightforward. (For a more recent discussion of the difficulties involved in using the aesthetic response as the definitive trait of art in non-Western cultures, see Price 1989.) Furthermore, within the discipline of art criticism itself, the last 15 years have seen challenges to the primacy of the aesthetic response within the general concept of art (e.g., Kuspit 1979:153–184); and, more tellingly, the modernist icon of “aesthetic response,” along with its companion concept, “significant form,” has virtually died from neglect, as postmodern critics have problematized a variety of other issues. But these reservations notwithstanding, it must be said that Maquet has made a significant contribution to the field by providing sensitive analyses of the capacity of *art sans*

theory to provoke an aesthetic response in some Western viewers. He has also examined the similarities between the aesthetic response and cognate affective states that have been described in other traditions, especially the contemplative meditation practices of some Hindu and Buddhist sects.

But, despite the rewards of Hardin's and Maquet's approaches, their limitations incline me to use a different strategy for pursuing an anthropological study of art, one that shifts the focus away from the aesthetic response. My method is grounded in Wittgenstein's later writings on language, especially as applied some years ago by Morris Weitz (1956) to the issue of how we might best talk about *art*. Weitz pointed out that, although there have been countless attempts to narrowly specify a trait (or list of traits) that is necessary and sufficient to determine unequivocally, now and forever, whether or not something is art, all have foundered on the craggy reality of ever-changing notions about art.

Following Wittgenstein's dictum, "Don't say: 'There *must* be something common'—but *look and see*" (1953:31, emphasis in original), Weitz claimed that when we examine the way *art* is used, the best we can do is generate a list of traits, most (or all) of which are present in most (or all) of the entities that are considered to be clear instances of *artworks* at a given time in a particular speech community. Conversely, things held to be *not art* lack most or all of these traits. Between *art* and *not art* there exists a gray area where entities are accepted as being art to the degree that they possess the "recognition criteria" that characterize artworks.¹ Further, as the passage of time brings different usages of *art*, or as one moves into different speech communities, the strands of similarities must be altered as little or as much as required by current local custom.

Weitz himself offers a list of recognition criteria for *art*, presumably based upon the way he and other thoughtful Westerners apply the word. He writes:

Thus, mostly, when we describe something as a work of art, we do so under the conditions of there being present some sort of artifact, made by human skill, ingenuity, and imagination, which embodies in its sensuous, public medium—stone, wood, sounds, words, etc.—certain distinguishable elements and relations. [1956:33]

With this statement as a starting point, it is possible to adopt an effectively inductive approach: Weitz's list of recognition criteria can be refined by examining things that meet them, then using analyses of those things to

clarify the criteria themselves. Thus, in *Caliope's Sisters* I draw upon accounts of what some Westerners consider to be art in the West and in nine diverse non-Western groups. I employ not only information about the art forms themselves but also—and to my mind, more significantly—principles regarding the nature of art derived from the art-producing culture: Whereas few peoples have coherent, explicit philosophies of art, all of those I have examined reveal many distinctly aesthetic notions, variously expressed in myths or stories of origin, in standards for ritual behavior, in taste for secular adornment, or, perhaps most interestingly of all, articulated within the idiom of art itself. (Typically such information, as it accumulates for a given society, begins to take on a coherent form, with a few fundamental themes appearing in various guises in different contexts, media, and so on.)

As a result of this survey, I have argued at length (Anderson 1990:221–284) that most of the things we consider to be art (and that other societies typically acknowledge as being in some way special, even if they are not lexically distinguished as *art*) meet most or all of the following criteria: they are artifacts of human creation; they convey significant cultural meaning; they are created with exceptional manual and/or mental skill; they are produced in a public medium; they are intended to create a sensuous effect; and they share stylistic conventions with works of similar geographic and temporal origin. (Close inspection will reveal that my list of traits is not far removed from the "recognition criteria" originally set down by Weitz [1956].)

The situation parallels that found in other areas of anthropology. For example, consider a non-Western society that has no single word that translates directly into English as *kinship* and that, similarly, lacks a coherently articulated theory of kinship. A fieldworker who encounters such a group is likely to possess an abstract concept of kinship, with constituent notions of consanguinity, marriage, lineality, and so on, all based on the way *kinship* has been used in the West generally, and especially among people, such as anthropologists, who talk a lot about kinship. The absence in a particular non-Western society of a native kinship system, explicitly and consciously verbalized by members of the culture, would not lead most researchers to conclude that the people have no kinship system or that there is nothing to be said regarding kinship in the society, especially if many of the concomitants of kinship, such as clans and lineages, rules of descent, and so on, are in evidence. Instead, one would set about gathering information that

has proven to be relevant to the study of kinship in other times and places and would, if successful, eventually infer an abstract system of kinship that explains, and is consistent with, the behavioral and linguistic data.²

This technique for studying kinship, while common,³ has limitations, and it does not rule out the effective use of other techniques. Analysts with a cognitive bent can productively apply the methods of ethnoscience, and biological anthropologists are likely to adopt yet another approach.

Likewise, the strategy I have outlined above for the cross-cultural study of art is not claimed to be the sole useful technique. But it does have certain benefits: it is applicable to societies that lack explicit native theories of art; it circumvents difficulties of identifying the elusive "aesthetic response" in settings that are remote from the Western paradigm of modernism in which the phrase was coined; and, perhaps most important, it provides a method for following a dictum set down by Maquet with which one can hardly disagree: "Anything that is relevant [to art] should be taken into account" (Maquet 1986:1).

Notes

¹For support of this position from the field of cognitive psychology, see Smith and Medin (1981).

²The epistemological parallels between analyses of art and kinship have also been noted by Dissanayake (1988:35).

³Eugene Ogan (personal communication, 1992) has pointed out that Schneider's critique (1984) of anthropologists' usual method of studying kinship parallels Hardin's criticism of my way of looking at non-Western philosophies of art. Nevertheless, most anthropological writing, past and present, is based on the premise that both kinship and art are found in all cultures (cf. Brown 1991:140).

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Sociobiology and Incest Avoidance: A Critical Look at a Critical Review

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