

Fascination of Social Science, Anthropology Above All

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Abstract

This article is an overview of social science, concentrating on anthropology; stressing its weaknesses in terms of lack of preciseness and limitations on some occasions as well as its strengths in other circumstances, which could be so “lucrative” that they may even arouse abusing intentions. On the other hand, social science, including anthropology, shares interesting traits with other verbal and descriptive disciplines and even has something common with art and even natural sciences. Nevertheless it is a formal discipline unattainable for the layman and is indeed a fascinating field to explore and its study contributes societies to improve.

Key words: Anthropology; Society; Behavior; Social science; Art; Know-how

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INTRODUCTION

When I was a boarding student, our American housemaster *Mr. Kuniholm* gave a wonderful slide show to us the boarding students in the dormitory building study hall, in one October evening. The topic was his summer impressions of Anatolia at the time, as taken through his amateur camera. My first interest in anthropology could very well have been stirred during this one-hour-long presentation session. A picture is still vividly embedded in my memory was the slide featuring a public toilet in a remote village.

On the archaic entrance door whose aged wood veins were bulging had been scribbled with white chalk in crooked small lettering: “Big job 25 *piastres*, small job 10 *piastres*”. The housemaster looked away from the audience with a shy smile and a blush discernible in the twilight at the scene suddenly emerged on the screen. (The former-English teacher Peter Kuniholm was to proceed his career later on with a Ph.D. degree in archeology!)

Even though it is a relatively young¹ social science, the scope of anthropology is immense as well as fantastically interesting. This is because it deals with human society; that abstract, indispensable-for-life, bewildering human environment surrounding us all.

In its larger sense society is a cluster, or system, of patterned interactions among organized groups of human beings [like the western society etc.]. More specifically, a society is organized groups of people who have distinctive social patterns, occupy a territory and have a sense of common identity [thus, for instance the Swiss society differing from the French one, though both are western]. (Coser et al., 1987, p.4)

All phenomena concerning human beings take on a significance within the medium² of society. For a lone in-

¹ Anthropology was born in France and United Kingdom in the nineteenth century as “ethnology”. It was under the name ‘anthropology’ that the first formal teaching in this discipline began at Oxford University in 1884. (Cheater, 1987, p.17)

² I remember an episode from a European movie which I watched in late 1980’s: A young girl falls in love with her gray-haired music tutor, a Hungarian immigrant. The man first resists the affair. But the young girl is daring and claiming. One evening, after the piano session, she sits at the stairs and simply stays there. The tutor can’t coax her to leave. Finally she screams: “Listen to me, you old gypsy! I will not go before settling this issue!” Her challenging attitude wins the man and he gives in. Still, the girl is content with their secret meetings, societal considerations are after all embedded in her consciousness. One day the man offers to go out together! The girl is amazed. The elderly man replies: “Lovers do want to be seen together!”.

An anonymous Turkish anecdote is also illuminating in explaining the perception of society: They asked a hunchback which choice he would prefer. Getting rid of his defect or else seeing everybody else defected like himself. He immediately chose the latter.

dividual, all values as well as all defects would crumble, disintegrate. Neither heroism nor abjectness would acquire a meaning. Would beauty matter for a woman who is not admired? How would a novelist feel if he couldn't convey his ideas to a single reader? Who would ever blame a solitary "coward"?

It is social anthropology as well as its cousin disciplines which probe into the relationship between the individual and his / her fellow-beings. Astronomy may not appeal to every one; however sociology refers to the vested interest of virtually everybody.

The way Stewart and Glynn (1985, p.8) put it,

on a more personal level [sociologists as cousins of social anthropologists] examine the interaction between group members and outsiders and the special experiences of types of individuals. They want to know what it means for Henry to have been beaten by brutal, abusive parents; for Carlos to have crossed the border from Mexico to compete for farm labor jobs; or for Ernestine to have been reared in an urban slum.

1. OVERLAPPING OF SCIENCE AND ART

Social anthropology and related social sciences can indeed be considered as a science, despite the fact that it is somewhat too different from natural sciences. *"Like other scientific disciplines, sociology engages in organized, systematic study of phenomena (in this case human behavior). All scientists, whether studying mushrooms or murderers, attempt to collect precise information"* (Schaefer, 1983, p.5).

Nevertheless some intervention (or maybe "contamination") of art elements are by no means lacking there. Art, which involves "human creativity, skill and a sense of beauty", does not pertain to purely behavioral sciences alone. There are numerous books with titles like "The Art of Politics", "the Art of Teaching", "The Art of War" etc.. Art even mingles with the physical sciences! This occurs because of the impossibility of isolation of ideal physical situations. A pendulum, thanks to the force of gravity, would go on swinging for ever, ideally. The air friction and the mechanical friction of attachment at its upper end damper the amplitudes and eventually stop the swing.

In my undergraduate days, while visiting a caustic soda plant, while visiting a caustic soda plant, a chief chemical engineer once said that engineering unfortunately involves some art as well as science. Now, in this quotation using the word "unfortunately" was unfortunate by itself. Why knock down the value of art? Why should mix with art be demeaning after all?

In all complicated technologies there exist fine points and "tricks" that would be ridiculous to note down on paper. Experience, ingenuity and even intuition make up for

many operational gaps³ and all that constitute what came to be known as "know-how".⁴ In this respect, a successful surgeon may measure the appropriate length of intestine to be cut off in term of spans rather than centimeters (or inches), for the sake of urgency and efficiency.

The new inclusion of the concept of emotional intelligence into social science appears to follow a similar course of action in its essence, too. Here more of art seems to intervene than in many other cases.

Similarly, today in primitive societies there are many complicated poisons whose developments were realized in accordance with mysticism and superstitions. Yet their components and formulas mostly "refuse" to yield to modern analytical methods. Some of them are from time to time standardized and put into the service of modern medicine. A substance resembling the arrow poison curare in the Amazon forests is one example and is used as a muscle loosening drug (Çaya, 1981, p.1, based on Foreign Literature).

2. SOCIAL SCIENCES AS SUBTLE DISCIPLINES WITH THEIR OWN DIFFICULTIES

Behavior is intricate by its very nature, so when it comes to studying behavior, many difficulties and ambiguities also come into play.

"Certainly a social science such as sociology is much less certain than a natural science. One deals with a subject matter, man, with an almost indefinite number of variables" (O'Donnell, 1988, p.12).

Positive sciences get their accuracy from the fact that matter does not "learn" from experience. No matter how many times you heat a piece of iron, the thermal expansion coefficient remains the same. The arms of a clock do not go faster after many drills, thus rendering the clock useful for us (paraphrased from C. O. Weber, 1964).

On the other hand, people's behavior constantly changes in accordance with the "lessons" "gleaned" on the way to further life experiences, which renders their behavior patterns even more complicated as time passes by.

I used to know a female intern doctor, who was a relentless enemy of beggars. (Feeling my annoyance about that fixation of hers, once in a letter addressed to me she wrote: *"Go to the same pool, order a glass of tea, light a cigarette and think about me. If beggars ever come near-*

³ A flour plant technician in *Edirne (Adrinople)* once narrated that an expert called from Italy had detected the worn out machinery pieces merely by listening to the emitted sounds. Whatever he said proved to be true and such pieces were accordingly replaced.

⁴ In an elective law course at Bosphorous University, our professor (Vakur, 1976) once said that plagiarizing know-how was a very controversial copyright issue in jurisdiction, the claims being too difficult to prove or disprove. (The Author)

by, dispel them; don't permit them to disturb your sweet meditating mood!"). She obviously had a reason for that negative attitude against beggars.

Upon her arrival from Anatolia in a big city for registration of a faculty of medicine as a boarding student, she had an incident. A shabby-looking woman at the gate of the research hospital of the faculty quickly told her a bitter illness story and asked for charity. In her joyful mood of a happy new medicine student, she gave her a considerable lump sum of money, thus reducing her own allowances.

Thirty steps away, another woman did the very same thing, thereby "shaking off" her *naïveté*.⁵ She immediately returned to the first woman to re-claim her money, which she could not recover (When I mentioned all this to my mother, following our frustrated separation, in need of some consolation; my mother was merely amazed at and impressed by the girl's resoluteness to go back and recover her pocket-money, instead of acquiring an attitude like "it was just a mistake and let bygones be bygones")

3. HARD-TO-GRASP BEHAVIOR CHANGES

"The social sciences rarely produce the clear-cut findings that are possible in the physical sciences. Sociological findings are not as readily transformed into practical applications. There are no laws of human behavior" (Bassiss et al., 1982, p.69).

An interesting situation could occur in the following manner: Now; Social Psychology [for instance] relatively

⁵ For all people with provincial origins, the prospect of being somehow deceived is a horrible outcome. They can not bear it. Being *rusé* or cunning is a great virtue and if someone ever takes them as gullible, their reaction is severe. An anonymous anecdote goes as follows: *The cunning peasant visits the big city for the first time. While he is gaping at a skyscraper with an open mouth, a swindler approaches him and asks him at which floor he is staring at. He must pay so many piastres. The peasant pays six piastres, asserting the authoritarian-looking new-comer that he had been watching the sixth floor. When he is left alone he congratulates himself for his alternative gain. In actuality, he had been staring at the tenth floor.* The Author

When I was a child my father was an army captain. For a time, he was also in charge of a twin company as the acting commander. A new conscript was complaining about his swollen, aching legs and my father assured his well-being, exempting him both from training and toiling in the barracks. After leaving the other company, an inter-companies running contest was held at the battalion. Among the other officers he was watching the competition. The winner proved to be a familiar face, that same conscript who "had troubles with his feet". Boasting off with raised hands in his victory tour, he noticed my father and immediately began to limp! My father let it go unnoticed. But in his fury, I and my sibling were scapegoats at the house, for quite a long time. Everything we said was cross-checked. The change money we brought back from the bakery was carefully counted and so on. (The Author)

firmly establishes the inhibiting effect of bystanders in helping behavior or altruism. The more people there are, the less reluctant is each one of them to help a person in distress (abridged and paraphrased from Baron and Byrne, 1987, pp.280-281). [The social loafing concept is in parallel, too. "*In a coordinated effort* [like a rope pulling game between two teams], *individual members decide to take it easy and let others do the work*" (Baron & Byrne, 1987, p. 387)].

Here it is appropriate to provide some very special information before going on with the proposed situation: In Islamic creed, participating in a sinful act increases the horror⁶ of the sin in a multi-fold manner, as compared to sin alone. The parallel holds true for virtuous acts. Solidarity in view of a good, helpful act for any needful being is supposed to increase the "degree" of the gained virtue, tremendously.

Let us now suppose that a Moslem individual in distress happens to be near a mosque on a Friday, the sacred day of the week, when a *hutbe* (religious advising speech) is delivered besides and before the routine noon prayers. Let us further suppose that the *imam* (head-prayer) had just conveyed a sermon about the bliss and blessings of pooling together the efforts of the pious believers for a good cause.

(As a matter of fact, this is how I had access to this theological knowledge once upon a time: Collaboration in committing a sinful action multiplies the penalty while cooperation for a virtuous action multiplies the reward).

Faithful Muslims leaving the mosque may rush together to help out that person in distress. Let us further suppose that a social psychologist witnesses the last scene, unaware of the just previous incentives and inciting. Wouldn't he / she be bewildered and have difficulty in explaining what he / she witnesses?

4. ETHICAL, LEGAL, AND OTHER RESTRICTIONS

"There are many ethical issues that may be raised in the context of a [social] research enterprise. There is, first, the issue of privacy, which is likely to become problematic. The second issue is informed consent from participating subjects" (Webb et al., 1981, p.145).

Legal concerns are also there to reckon with. For example, if a researcher were to investigate the flow

⁶ Interestingly enough, the Turkish Penal Code (and I have a feeling that it may be true for other penal codes as well) foresees heavier penalties if a given crime / felony (murder, wounding, sexual assault, burglary) is committed with culprits. Turkey, though a "derivative" of the former Ottoman Empire, is a secular state established through a revolutionary movement under the leadership of *Atatürk* and the idea beyond a secular juridical item overlaps with the religious idea at this specific point. (The Author)

of expert power and competitions of institutions⁷ over expertise; how could he achieve this attempt?

Wilhelm Reich's life represents a tragic lesson of legal opposition to social research. A former assistant of Freud, this eccentric psychiatrist escaped the Nazi-Germany and ended up in America; but his chances did not improve.

*Reich developed the theory that sexual energy is nothing but the universal energy (which he named 'orgone') peculiar to the living. He established a gigantic laboratory in order to capture, store and use that energy. But McCarthyism movement put him into trouble (from the back-cover introduction by translator Bertan Onaran on the Turkish version of one of the author's books: *Kişilik Çözümlemesi* [Personality Analysis] 1991).*

In 1954 a complaint for an injunction was issued against him. Reich refused to be forced into court as a "defendant" in matters of basic natural research. He was subsequently accused of criminal contempt in disobeying this order and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. He died in a federal prison in 1957. (From the back cover of his book *Listen, little Man*, 1979)

5. POSSIBLE TEMPTATIONS FOR ABUSE

Political movements and other interest-seeking tendencies may fall into or stoop to a temptation to abuse the power of social anthropology (or other social sciences for that matter). This is what Hitler resorted to at the time, for instance.

Hitler conceived from the first day that propaganda in Germany can not attain its goal unless accompanied by a deployment of forces and a submission to command. In consequence, the collective propaganda of Hitler consisted of limitless obedience to the Führer as well as an absolute enslavement and crushing of the enemy. (Reiwald, 1949, p.255)

Many profit-seeking people, too, (knowingly or not) employ techniques which are of interest for social sciences. Using face-in-the-door (asking for a big favor and settling for a smaller one) or foot-in-the-door (asking for a small favor and incrementally obtaining much bigger ones) techniques are only two such examples.

The former is more rarely resorted to but it could be very effective in the right place. A child who demands to

⁷ "Expert power, based on the authority of knowledge, can wield a great deal of influence" (Huse & Bowditch, 1977, p.220). The owner of expert power is accordingly jealous to share it with others. For example, even the police authorities and secret services are sometimes reciprocally reluctant to provide information for one another. This matter, on occasion, makes surface and appears as a piece of news on the press. Similarly, having cooperated previously, they may not share a certain resulting success without a fuss.

⁸ Female British novelist *Daphne du Maurier* deals with that topic in a science fiction short story: At a remote, dubious research center, a scientist, MacLean, gets engaged in secret research. His collaborating assistant, Ken, is bound to die of cancer very soon. MacLean "stores" Ken's life energy (or soul or whatever) in a device and through the mediation of a little girl, *Nik*, he establishes communication with the "fresh" dead person. The girl visibly suffers implores MacLean to let him go!

borrow his friend's bicycle may very easily obtain his lollipop candy instead. Giving away the lollipop will appear like an insurance document for the bicycle in the eyes of the other kid.

As for the latter, it seems to be used more often because it mostly works. "When individuals commit themselves in a small way, the likelihood they will commit themselves further in that direction is increased" (Aronson 1992, p.189). I became a victim of the latter method myself once in my high school days.

Returning from my (Thracian) home, I was on the verge of transferring to another municipal bus in *Sirkeci* district of Istanbul to get my boarding school. I was a scholarship student there and I had only one lira (Turkish money unit) left over that Sunday afternoon. Near the bus station, at the courtyard of the *Ottoman Mosque* dominating the square; all of a sudden; a smiling, dark complexioned youngish woman held a small tin vessel full of corn grains before me and requested me to spread it on the ground for the pigeons to pick up. The price was written on the can: One fourth of a lira, the same amount as the student bus fare.

I took the vessel (the cap of a glass jar) and offered its content to the pigeons. But the woman hastily threw up three more measures (or to be more precise, half-measures) of grains to the pigeons without my consent and obviously "for my sake" and thus, in a sense, she came to "deserve" a whole lira (all of my money) with that *fait accompli*. The shy student I was, I had to walk all the way to my school, in two hours.

Many confidence artists also make much of similar elaborated methods. *For instance, a seller first spends some time and some goods to gain confidence of the audience (distributing cheap fruit knives freely on behalf of a phony company). He then sells so-called higher quality knives at high prices and comes up with a substantial profit* (Smith, Marmara University, 1991).

6. ANTHROPOLOGY IS NO LAYMAN'S BUSINESS

Anybody might consider himself some of an anthropologist at some point, whereas he/she may actually be far from the necessary qualifications. This is after all, a formal discipline, which is to be gained solely through scholarly efforts and sweat.

In social anthropology even careful choice of words count a lot, the field having its own indispensable jargon. The words "person" and "individual" may be interchangeable in every day language. They are wide apart in social anthropology. Many other meaning shades also exist among at first sight very similar concepts.

As Mauss (1969, p.30) emphasizes, *the words like family, tribe, village and clan do not designate the one and the same thing as many authors suppose.*

Moreover, an every day word may acquire an entirely different meaning⁹ in the context of social sciences.

Still, laymen can claim to interfere in some social science fields. For instance, a history professor once complained that many intellectuals with different backgrounds take themselves as authorities in history.

Similarly; some other functions in society appear to compete with and irritate counsel providing educated job holders. In ignorant, backward societies so-called sorcerers are prone to this. In highly developed but more and more spiritually frustrated and burnt out western societies, new religion figures outside the mainstream churches seem to replace them.

General therapeutic and “helping” professionals such as psychiatrist, psychologists and social workers are predisposed to be hostile to cults. The conflict between mental health professionals and cult leaders is heightened by the hegemonic desire on the part of both groups. In a sense and spiritual masters have become competitors of licensed therapists. (Robbins, 1985, p.12)

An anthropologist is a person who is gathers data down in the actual field instead of at the table. Delaney (1991, p.257) who studied a mid-Anatolian village in 1980’s writes the following interesting passage in her book:

A friend in Ankara was teaching a course on rural sociology at Middle East Technical University and conducting a survey of “fringe” villages around Ankara. As a comparison she asked if she could bring her class to survey our more remote village. [When the class arrived] for many of the students, it was the first time they have ever been to a real village.

An anthropologist is a scholar who literally lives in the field for a certain time. He must manage to deal with the local people. He must endure the form of deprivation unfamiliar to him in his earlier life. Naturally he could, if possible, opt for the relatively easy and comfortable conditions. It appears that this is what the British scholar *Stirling* did to investigate some mid-Anatolian villages:

I was in *Sakaltutan* from November 1949 to August 1950, my wife joining me in March. It had an excellent water supply, more or less regular lorries into *Kayseri*, and eleven other villages within an hour and a half’s walk. In 1951 we returned to the area. From August to November we lived in the second village, *Elbashi*, some five hours’ walk east of the first, and, in the summer vacation of 1952 I returned alone to this village for two months. I chose *Elbashi* because it appeared to provide certain

⁹ At a pedagogical seminar arranged for teachers and various faculty members the instructor, once just before the break, said “as we grow older we assume many more roles like a parent role, a boss role, a commander role etc.. The participants were of various majors. At the break some had puzzled facial expressions. Finally a mathematician exploded: “So, he insulted us implicitly. Are we all hypocrites now?”. A physicist was smiling at him approvingly. The two were interpreting the word “role” in the sense of *mise en scène* (staging) instead of “the expected behavior associated with a social position” as Mitchell (1979, p.159) would define it. I and a few others stepped in and explained the concept, cooling down their indignant sullenness!

contrasts with *Sakaltutan*, being richer, more dependent on agriculture, more sophisticated, and less isolated. (Stirling 1965, p.6).

7. UTILITARIAN NATURE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

It is thanks to Anthropology and other related social sciences that many mistakes are avoided and many right decisions are taken on big issues concerning people. Even that good old *common sense* is not much of use in many situations (though it is not to be underestimated in daily life). Common sense is “contaminated” with ethically and factually wrong factors like discrimination based on gender, race, creed, status. It is “shaped” by prejudices and stereotypes. Common senses come together are apt to fall into groupthink (a collective, often mistaken reasoning where nobody dares to disturb the ambiance and speak out a different view).

The sociological [*and for that matter also anthropological*] perspective provides a view of human behavior that enables us to see situations—and ourselves—in a special light. As a result, the familiar looks new to us, as if we were outsiders. The unequal and unjust treatment of blacks [in America] was seen in a new light when an outsider (Swedish Gunnar Myrdal) was assigned to study the situation. [Besides] sociology helps us to understand “strange” behaviors and unfamiliar situations. For example, many high-ranking positions in the classical Eastern empires were held by eunuchs. Without roots¹⁰ or kin, eunuchs owed allegiance only to their rulers. (Coser et al., 1987, pp.15-16)

Social scientists have responsibilities. In order to fulfill them there are tools at his / her disposal. One is the sum of all research methods. Such methods consist of *cross-sectional study*, (*prospective or retrospective longitudinal study*, and *observational studies* (*impressionistic, statistical-comparative, questionnaire and interview, participant-observer*) etc. (abridged from Horton and Hunt, 1976, pp.23-28).

Another tool is the sum of various theories.

There is really no alternative to theorise. If we did away with it, we would be left with a jumble of data and impressions. Facts and impressions gain meaning (and therefore sometimes imply the need for action) by their relatedness, their “theoretical” nature. Finding relationships among facts bring them into some coherent conceptual order. Thinking through such order, and explaining it, is the process of theorizing. (Skidmore, 1979, p.13)

¹⁰ The Ottoman society also established a system whereby children from the Balkans were recruited, converted to Islam and reared to high offices. The Janissary corps were comprised entirely of such soldiers. With no roots and relations behind, only through merit, one could ascend all the way to the ranks of pashas and eventually the post of Grand vizier, just below the Sultan himself. The *Kizlaraghasi* (chief eunuch) and his helpers the other eunuchs in charge of protecting the concubines and other womenfolk (sultan’s mother, daughters etc.), all confined to the Harem section of the palace, were blacks or whites in possession of immense political and military power.

CONCLUSION

Anthropology is a wonderful field of study. Its undeniable uses left aside, it is an intrinsic pleasure by itself merely to deal with Social Anthropology. It is like a privilege to be a scholar of Social Anthropology. As Ember and Ember (1988, p.2) put it

Anthropology defines itself as a discipline of infinite curiosity about human beings. Anthropologists do seek answers to an enormous variety of questions about humans. They are interested in discovering when, where and why humans appeared on the earth, how and why they have changed since then, and how and why modern human populations vary in certain physical features. Anthropologists are also interested in how and why societies in the past and present have varied in their customary ideas and practices.

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- (Yeni) Türk Ceza Kanunu [(the new) Turkish Penal Code].

APPENDIX: SOME VISUAL MATERIAL

Social anthropology essentially makes research on cultures of people, the so-called primitive tribes, above all.

The following pictures had been re-drawn with some adaptations from French comicstrips; by the author himself, while studying that language intensively, in the previous years.

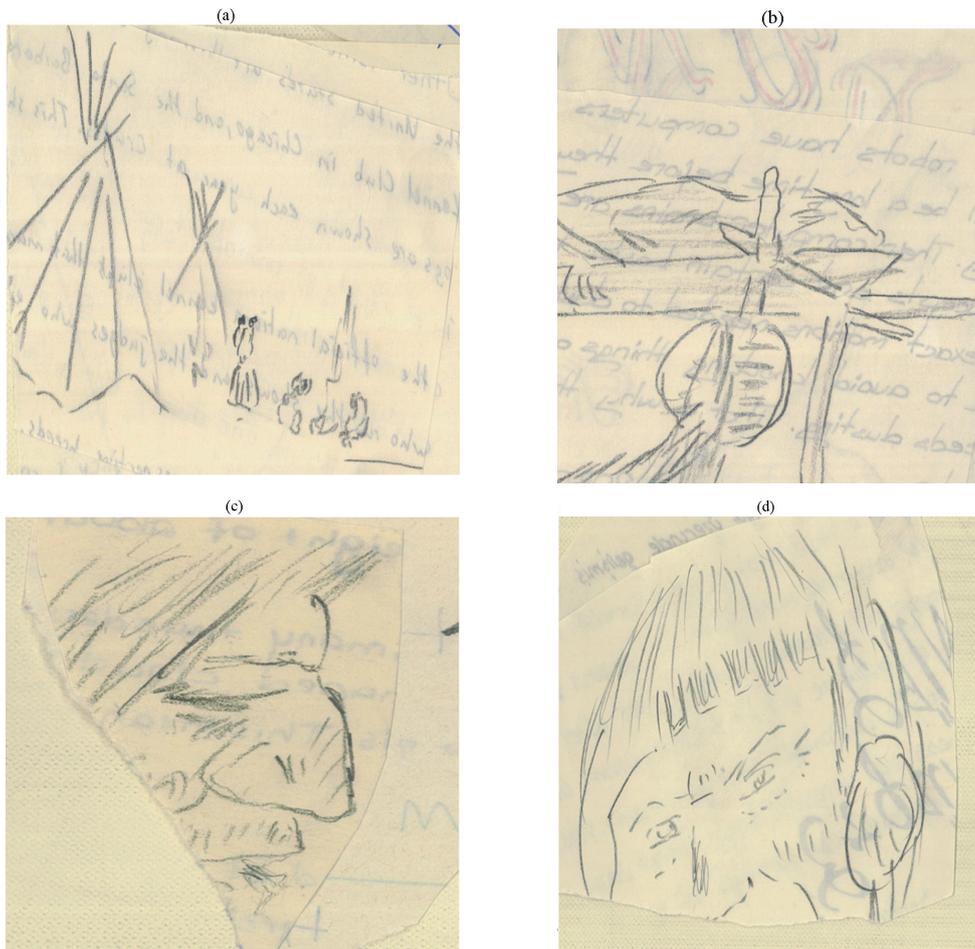


Figure 1
(a) American-Indian Tents; (b) One of Their Open-Air Graves; (c) an Elderly Man; (d) a Young Warrior



Figure 2
An Amazon Native Blowing a Minute Poisonous Arrow Through a Reed



Figure 3
A Native of the North African Desserts, Who Knows the Landscape Very Well

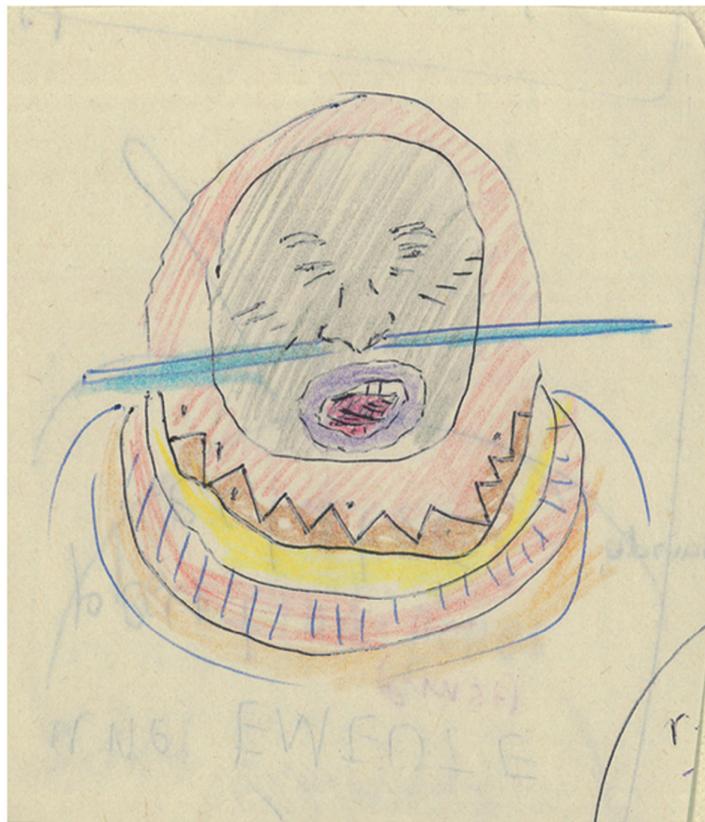


Figure 4
Male Beauty Understanding in the Depths of African Continent: A Rod Piercing Through the Cartrilige-Bone Partition Between the Nostrils



Figure 5
Female Beauty Understanding in the Depths of African Continent: A Neck Incrementally and Forcefully Elongated in the Course of Years With Added Rings, as Well as a Shaven Portion at the Top of the Head

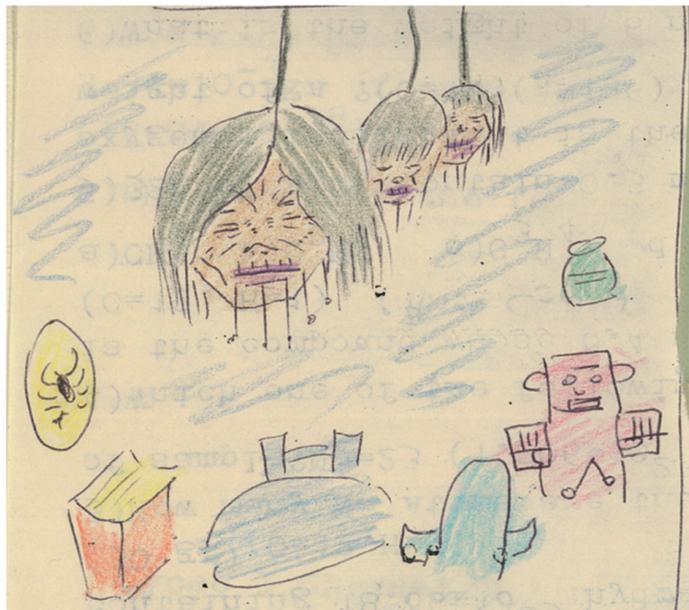


Figure 6
Shrunken Heads in Amazon Regions. Heads of the Hostile Tribe's Warriors Are Proportionately Reduced to the Average Size of an Orange, Via Certain Secret Operations of Physical and Chemical Nature