

## A STONE-AGE ANTHROPOLOGIST LOOKS AT ‘TUCSON III’

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*There is more than one ‘hard problem’. Just as it is hard for consciousness to grasp itself, it is also hard to examine your own society from the ‘outside’. The same problem applies to scientific paradigms (Kuhn, 1962), our taken-for-granted assumptions generally, and the collective representations that sustain them — such as soup spoons and scientific conferences (Durkheim, 1912; Bourdieu, 1977). To get an ‘outside’ view of ‘Tucson III’, I asked my friend Tjiniman, who is a stone-age hunter, to help me out. He is studying anthropology part-time, though he does not believe everything he is told, and prefers to retain his traditional world-view. The following account is mainly his, with a few suggestions from me (CW).*

The first thing a blackfellow notices about a white man when he sees him for the first time is that he is deaf (*momba*), that he does not take notice of things around him, and he does not ‘feel’ anyone that is near him. His bodily senses have been out of use for so long that they do not function any more (Ryan, 1969, p. 45; cited in Knight, 1987).

This ritual is called ‘Tucson III’, because it has only been held three times. It is a new ritual, so I supposed it would be like a cargo cult or revitalization movement. Like the rituals of our own people, it is divided into three parts (van Gennepe, 1909). The first part is called ‘Registration’ and the last part is called ‘Music and Dancing in the Holiday Inn Empire Ballroom’. The first was very short, and the last poorly attended. The Tucsonites do not need to take a big step out of the everyday world and back again, because the ritual world is not thought of as spiritual.

There is no drumming, hand-clapping, music, singing, dancing, or any of the proper means we use to carry everyone back to the time of origins (Eliade, 1949). There is no body paint and no attempt to attract or influence propitious spirits, using pleasant aromas or beautiful forms and colours. More than one third of the presentations consist in displays of oratory — but with no stirring gestures or sense of narrative drama. Some, called *philosophers*, even read their papers from the podium, because the Tucsonites have poor memories, and do not know how to use signs around them as reminders of what they should say. Worse, the remaining presentations were not even performed at all, but merely stuck on boards for people to look at. The only sacred point of the proceedings was called a ‘Poetry Slam’, but the poets competed with each other shamelessly; only one performance showed a proper spirit of community, the *Zombie Blues*, which was danced and sung in proper style by three Big Men of the Tucsonites.<sup>1</sup> But for this, the entire affair could be described as a festival of disembodied heads, and I had to keep pinching and slapping myself to make sure I was not going mad.<sup>2</sup>

I think the ancestors of the Tucsonites must have committed some serious crime, just as we did when we killed the Rainbow Snake, which once joined heaven and

[1] David Chalmers, Stuart Hameroff and Pradeep Mutalik

[2] J. Gackenbach, during discussion following a paper on Navajo cosmology (Abstract 462), described the experience of a Cree woman from Alberta: attending a conference for the first time, she was alarmed because she could ‘see nothing but people’s heads’, and thought she might be going mad.

earth, and made all people one.<sup>3</sup> They have their own story about this, called the Garden of Eden myth, but I did not believe it. It is like the tales we tell to women, to prevent them knowing the truth, for the story blames the serpent and the woman, who were actually the victims of the crime (Knight, 1991).

I soon realized that 'Tucson III' is not so much like a cargo cult as a potlatch. But instead of sacrificing real and beautiful objects of wealth, such as coppers, blankets, and slaves (Mauss, 1925), this is a potlatch of ideas. And this creates a problem, for the ritual has nowhere to go, since they have no unified, sanctioned, or permanent cosmology. In the course of six days, the Tucsonites told almost five hundred stories, each invented independently, showing distinct signs of originality, and often logically incompatible with each other. Our own people also like new things — such as songs, dances, and better fish traps — but these are not things people just make up to suit themselves, they are given to us in dreams and visions by the ancestors.

But things are not all bad with the Tucsonites; they do agree with each other on certain matters. Most of the stories that I heard during 'Tucson III' were based on one or other of their three great myths. I should really call them 'theories' or 'paradigms', as they are not proper myths, for they come from the disembodied world of talking heads, and not from the embodied world of song, dance and drama, which even children know is better than talk, or from otherworld journeys, which Tucsonites call 'alien abductions'.

The first great myth is called Reductionism and it is all about brains and information processing, for the Tucsonites think they think with their heads, and that everything is made of information. But we know we think with our hearts, and as selves are made by relationships, so all things must be made of meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Because they can read and write, they think words are everything, even the basis of consciousness and society. But who would believe words if we did not first exchange gifts with people and with spirits? (Knight, in press.) And what would we talk about if there was no society or consciousness? (cf. Durkheim, 1912; Knight, in press.)

Anthropology teaches that all cosmologies are projections of society onto the cosmos. Of course we know that in our case it is the other way round, for we do everything according to a cosmic model. But it seems to be true of science. In the early days, when clocks were the best things science could produce, they said the universe was a big clock. But now they have invented computers, they think the universe is a computer. I once met a Bushman who told me that God looks like a Dutchman (Katz, 1982), and I thought this was a much more intelligent idea.

Charles Tart,<sup>5</sup> one of their Big Men, helped to make their thinking clear to me. He explained that scientists believe only what they can see and measure, and not what they know to be true by experience. So dreams became 'real' through EEG recording, and meditation became 'real' through physiological measurement. I suppose they have now decided consciousness is 'real' because they can 'see' it on a brain scan.

Now I think there is a third reason why they believe in brains and computers. It is because of killing the Rainbow Snake. The Tucsonites have lost their heart-soul and

[3] There are many references to this world-wide mythic theme in Eliade (1951) and Knight (1987; 1991).

[4] 'Heads' versus 'hearts' based on Ochwiay Bianco, in Jung (1963, p. 276).

[5] In the pre-conference workshop *Observing the Mind*.

have only their head-soul left. We are better off because we only killed the Rainbow Snake once, and kept its memory alive by making a true image in our rituals, and never denied our guilt. But the ancestors of the Tucsonites killed it twice more. First they turned even the dead image upside down, saying the Rainbow Snake was a ‘monster of chaos’, and that Marduk was a hero for killing Tiamat and creating the cosmos from her dismembered body (Eliade, 1949, p. 55). This is the same as Jehovah killing Rahab (*ibid.* p. 60; cf. Psalm 89.10), and the Garden of Eden story. Then, in what they call ‘The Enlightenment’, they killed off even these upside down beliefs. So that is killing the Rainbow Snake three times. And each time the reason was the theft of power: first from women, second from citizens, and third from ‘Nature’: by which they meant women, non-scientists, non-Europeans, and the universe (Jordanova, 1980). That was the beginning of this new myth, which is also called ‘Materialism’. They did not know that myths and people change together, so the whole of life became Materialist.

The second major myth is called ‘Transcendentalism’, and the people who believe this myth want to change the whole basis of Tucsonite science. They want to bring the Rainbow Snake back to life, which I think is going too far, for it will take us right back to the Rule of Women: women are the only ones with the real power that everyone wants, the power to create life.

They want their science to be more contemplative, which usually means they want to be Buddhists, and they deny that mind can be reduced to brains and information. They know that mind is continuous beyond the boundaries of the body, and able to travel outside space and time. Several people called ‘parapsychologists’ were present to provide some of the evidence their science, like ours, demands.

This return to a spiritual basis is what anthropologists call ‘re-enchantment’. The Transcendentalists were outnumbered by the Reductionists, but the power of a myth cannot be measured by the number of times it is told, and I think this myth may have more of a following than at first appears. One of the Tucsonites (Baruss, Abstract 481) tried to test this at the previous ‘Tucson II’. The answers people gave him showed a shift away from Materialism towards Transcendentalism, compared with ten years earlier. One contemplative (Vaughan, Abstract 374) asked her audience how many of them practised meditation or had some other spiritual practice. I turned my head to see how many raised their hands, and it was most of the ones that I could see.

There were five pre-conference workshops with transcendentalist content. One was called *In the Zone* (Rhea White and Suzanne Brown) and was about ‘exceptional human experiences’. The Tucsonites think of these as ‘anomalous’ because they do not yet have a science like ours to make sense of them, or a technology like ours which can make use of them. In one of her leaflets, *How to Write an EHE Autobiography*, Rhea White says this:

We need a new story to make sense of who we are as human beings and why we are here. The story of mechanistic, behaviouristic science has resulted in anomie, loss of meaning and connection, boredom, and the need for ever more violent ‘kicks’ and dangerous ‘highs’. There is a dangerous lack of reverence toward other humans, life forms, and life itself. Perhaps the most practical thing we can do is write a better story.

Even some of the brain and computer people are really Transcendentalists, such as one who spoke of the ‘re-enchantment of matter’ (Rosenberg, Abstract 22). So, after

all, 'Tucson III' is a little like a cargo cult or a revitalisation movement, which also set out to 'tell a better story'.

The third great myth is called Quantum Mechanics. This is really two myths which are like the Reductionist and Transcendentalist myths. The only difference is that the brain quantum people talk about microtubules rather than neurones, whilst the cosmic quantum people are Animists.

There were not too many presenters in the quantum camp, but they included some very charismatic orators who, because of the potlatch system, are bound to become Big Men if they keep talking. These myths may solve the differences between the two main myths, and unite them back into one. If they continue this work, they may get to the truth as our people understand it.

I do not say Reductionism is wrong. We also enquire into material causes. It is only wrong when it denies what it does not know. But Materialism is wrong because it denies the basis of society and consciousness. The new Tucsonite interest in consciousness, and in Transcendentalism, are parallel movements, away from materialism towards re-enchantment. If the myths are being rewritten at Tucson, the same changes must be happening in the larger society that the Tucsonites represent. I do not think the Rainbow Snake is really dead. We have just banished it from society. If the Tucsonites are not careful, it may return, or like a snake shedding its outgrown skin, it may come new again in fresh and glittering colours. I am not sure the Tucsonites will like this.

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