



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Remarks and Inventions: Skeptical Essays about Kinship by Rodney Needham
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Remarks and Inventions: Skeptical Essays about Kinship. *Rodney Needham*. London: Tavistock (distributed in the U.S. by Barnes and Noble, New York), 1974. 181 pp., figures, maps, tables, bibliography, indexes. \$11.75 (cloth).

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The dust cover of this book tells us that the author "... has published more original work on kinship than any other living social anthropologist." It might very well have added that in addition to being the most published, he is probably the least understood. Ever since the beginnings of the now tedious, and never-ending debate over the Purum, Needham has been described as a sort of naive empiricist who assumes that the consequence of an actor's articulation of a rule is that he must follow it unswervingly. Why, when this is demonstrably false for other types of action, Needham should think it true for systems of prescriptive alliance, his commentators never tell. Needham is not entirely without blame for these misinterpretations. He is generous in his evaluation of positive contributions, and vigorously opposed to those he thinks in error. Both his generosity and the vigor of his criticism lead him to occasional overstatement. This and his tendency to publish much of his analyses of kinship in journals not readily accessible to many American scholars may account for the caricature that passes for a description of his theoretical pronouncements on kinship.

This little book in which Needham sets out his position on the analysis of kinship systems is both valuable and welcome. Many of Needham's critics will finally have the opportunity to discover what he has actually said, instead of paraphrasing Harris' rehash of Ackerman's critique of Needham's reanalysis of Das's book on the Purum. The book consists of three essays. The first, "Remarks on the Analysis of Kinship and Descent," reprinted from *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage*, is a how-to-do-it manual in which Needham sets out suggestions and principles for the analysis of kinship, descent, marriage, and incest. The second essay, "Age, Category, and Descent," reprinted from *Bidragen*, is regarded by Needham as one of his most important substantive contributions to the analysis of kinship systems. In it he examines the problem of the discrepancies that may exist between shared definition of social actors in terms of genealogically defined generations and their actual age. He finds that some societies choose to recognize differences in real age and ignore determination by

genealogical level. Other societies, most notably those organized on the basis of descent principles, do not recognize differences between genealogical levels and actual patterns of age. Needham tentatively concludes that marriage serves as a means of adjusting contradictions between socially posited age and actual age in cognatic societies and that actual age must be recognized in order for the adjustment to occur. In societies with descent groups that are exogamous, marriage could not adjust discrepancies between age and category, and genealogical manipulation is a mechanism that serves the same purpose.

The third essay, "Surmise, Discovery, and Rhetoric," is a piece of anthropological detective work in which Needham investigates Radcliffe-Brown's claim to have discovered the Kariera type of section system. Finally, the book is prefaced by a very useful and, for Needham, relatively short introduction which assesses the importance of the contributions.

The outlines of Needham's approach are becoming clear. These essays present a much clearer statement of his position than *Structure and Sentiment*. For him virtually all previous approaches to the analysis of kinship fail because they assume that categories derived from the language and society of the investigator have cross-cultural validity. As Needham puts it, "... professional discriminations made by social anthropologists tend to fragment deleteriously the complexes of meaning by which other people lead their lives" (p. 35). Kinship is only part of systems of social classification. These entire systems must be analyzed in order to discover the principles of organization on which they are based. The only proper typologies of these systems of classification must be based on discriminations among the different principles and not on the jural or behavioral aspects of social action. The latter two cannot serve as a basis for valid comparison because they are affected by contingencies and not organized according to principles.

Needham would not, I think, regard propositions about social transactions as organizing principles. As universals they would have no analytical power. The result of valid classifications will be to discover the range of principles by which peoples interpret their experience. By following this program for analysis anthropologists will obliterate the ethnocentrism implicit in the assumption that their categories are universally valid, and discover the natural limitations on logical possibilities that constrain human invention.

This model for analysis suggests that Needham considers social anthropology to be more of a branch of empirical philosophy than a subject devoted to the analysis of social action. His approach is similar in some respects to the form of cultural analysis advocated by Schneider and his students. Needham appears more interested in how people resolve the contradictions between their collective representations and reality. Hence he stays closer to the level of cultural specificity.

Nowhere in this book does he assume that an actor's behavior is determined by the systems of classification that he holds. He shows a lively awareness of the importance of different levels in the analysis of kinship. This book, at the very least, represents a challenge that must be answered by proponents of other modes of kinship analysis.

I would like to conclude with a few reviewer's complaints. In a volume of this sort, which sums up two decades of work, the readers might be given a complete bibliography of Needham's other publications on kinship so that they can go to the sources and judge for themselves. Also, Needham's magisterial essay on "Prescription" (*Oceania* 43:166-181, 1974) ought to have been included so we can have his latest thoughts on the subject. The final line on page 73 is incorrect and should be replaced by "to all types of kinship systems."

Another Place: Photographs of a Maya Community. *Frank Cancian*. San Francisco: Scrimshaw Press, 1974. 93 pp., photographs, notes, bibliography. \$12.50 (cloth), \$6.95 (paper).

Growing Up Female: A Personal Photo-journal. *Abigail Heyman*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974. 109 pp., photographs, text. \$11.95 (cloth), \$6.95 (paper).

Suburbia. *Bill Owens*. San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1972. 96 pp. \$11.95 (cloth), \$6.95 (paper).

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These are three recent books reflecting the vitality and sophistication of what may be called ethnographic photography, the endeavor to depict, often with an eye on the general human condition, the ways in which people are living.

By his title Frank Cancian invites us to view his pictures of people going about the

familiar business of living as it is done in the *municipio* of Zinacantan, but we are to do it largely independently of the usual verbal tools of ethnologic study. The assumptions and methods of the New Ethnography are ignored; we have no indications of categories in terms of which the natives are assumed to be following some strategy or another. The etic concepts developed by anthropologists are also missing. We see nothing in text or pictures of kinship or property rights. The few brief paragraphs, introduced one at a time among the photographs, only provide some orientation for viewing the pictures following each insertion.

Rather than recording objective details of the environment, physique, and material culture, Cancian's photography conveys a sense that the Zinacantecos are living, and living together, occasionally excitedly, at times apprehensively, sometimes pensively, often happily and almost always with dignity and satisfaction. Yet we know, as described in some detail in other studies from the Harvard Chiapas Project and in Cancian's other publications, that there are conflicts and tensions. Nothing of the personal dilemma of people marginal to the society, of competition for position in the local prestige hierarchy, or of stresses within the cultural pattern is given in the book. In the other books here considered, people identified primarily as photographers have written more extensively than has Cancian in order to make their statements about a culture clear.

Growing Up Female is a book with both words and camera focused on popular anthropological issues. The text is extensive enough to constitute a full presentation of the dilemma in which Abigail Heyman finds herself. The photographs amplify and document her stated concern more than carry the message themselves. The author photographer is more of an articulate informant than an investigator. She is very open about her conflicting ideas and sexual experience. Since childhood she has been fantasizing dressing up and being attractive. Thus her pictures show various ways this can be done: as a beauty queen, as a majorette, in exotic underwear, and other getups. She writes of "being" what a string of not-really-so-significant others wanted. But she found herself smart, athletic, and with a developing "ego." Later she contrasts the images of a nude flat on her back with her legs spread out before dull, gazing male faces at the bar, and of a grinning man wearing a large button saying "Happiness is a warm pussy" with the view of sex as knowledge of self and other.

In his introduction to *Suburbia*, Bill