LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Words, like human beings, embody avatars. Their meaning is transformed, expanding or contracting under multiple influences; in the end it is the collective will that always triumphs despite the resistance of elites or of schools. Such was the fate of the word which originally denoted the science of man in his totality and in his complexity: the word "anthropology."

In his opening lecture of June 17, 1856, Armand de Quatrefages, the first official professor of anthropology in France, said: "The complete history of a living being must include his external characteristics, his customs, his anatomy: one must present his physiology, one must follow his development. . . . Human intelligence well merits that one take into account its more or less complete development. . . . Animals have a voice, man alone possesses speech, he alone has language: can we neglect the manifestations of so characteristic an activity?" In 1889 this same scholar confirmed this point of view: "Language, the degree of civilization, industries, arts, customs, religious beliefs . . . present so many characteristics which at times distinguish two juxtaposed groups from one another, and at other times reveal unexpected relationships between two populations separated by a vast expanse." And Broca, as early as 1862, proclaimed before the members of the Anthropological Society of Paris: "We are not gathered here solely for the purpose of studying the actual state of human races. . . . We further propose, via the multiple channels of anatomy, physiology, history, archeology, linguistics, and finally paleontology, to

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401309 Published online by Cambridge University Press

find out what have been the origins, the filiations, the migrations, the mixtures of the numerous and diverse groups that compose the human species, in historical times and during the ages that preceded the most remote memories of humanity." In 1876, in his opening lecture at the Anthropological School which he had just founded, Broca enumerated the six fundamental courses that necessarily correspond to all the aspects of anthropology: 1. Anatomical Anthropology. 2. Biological Anthropology. 3. Ethnology. 4. Prehistoric Anthropology. 5. Linguistic Anthropology. 6. Demography and Medical Geography.

Unfortunately, the word "anthropology" which, in the minds of these scholars, designated the complex of disciplines which constitutes the science of man, has witnessed little by little a restriction of its meaning and today usually evokes no more than the idea of the study of races or of human populations, from the physical point of view. A chair of anthropology, an Anthropological Museum would signify, for the immense majority of Frenchmen, a professorship dedicated to the study of anatomical or biological characteristics, the natural history of man, an establishment where the visitor would expect to find nothing but craniums or skeletons.

This obvious distortion of the word "anthropology" has led scholars more and more to substitute for it the word "ethnology." The initiative for this substitution seems to have originated in Germany, where the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* dates from 1869, and in the United States, where the Bureau of Ethnology was founded in 1879. In France the word appears for the first time in December, 1925, when the University of Paris founded the Institut d'Ethnologie. The chair of anthropology became, in turn, the chaire d'Ethnologie des hommes actuels et fossiles, under circumstances that should be indicated because they fully justify this change of title. Up to 1928 this chair embraced only anatomical collections; collections relating to the material civilizations of diverse populations of the world had been assembled since 1877 in a special museum in the old Palais du Trocadéro. Although the director of this ethnographical museum had been, from the beginning, the professor of the museum who held the chair of anthropology—E. T. Hamy, at first, then R. Verneau—the two establishments remained autonomous. In 1928, when I succeeded R. Verneau at the museum, I was also offered the directorship of the Musée du Trocadéro. I accepted on condition that from then on the two collections should become an integral part of the chair that I was about to occupy. Thereafter, this chair represented no longer merely the spirit but the polyvalent character of these collections, as a chair devoted in truth to the

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science of man in the broadest and most synthesized meaning of the word. The term "anthropology," because of its distortion, was no longer suitable, and this is why the Assemblée des professeurs unanimously decided to call it chaire d'Ethnologie des hommes actuels et fossiles. The expediency of this new title appeared even more clearly when, in 1938, the anatomical and ethnographical collections were assembled under one roof in the Musée de l'Homme.

Thus "ethnology" corresponds exactly to what was originally called "anthropology"; that is to say, it embraces the study of the physical characteristics of peoples or, properly speaking, anthropology; the study of the material characteristics of civilizations: prehistory, archeology, ethnography, the study of social or sociological phenomena, the history of religions, the study of linguistic characteristics.

An eminently complex science, but one where all the disciplines, different as they may seem, are, in reality, strictly interdependent. I am fully aware of the fact that some people deny this interdependence and maintain that there is no necessary relationship between anthropological, cultural, and linguistic data. I am, in accordance with many eminent scholars, of an entirely contrary opinion. This is what A. de Quatrefages has written: "Nations have carried away with them their customs and their civilizations. . . . Sometimes we find in the form of an urn the indication of an origin. . . . Language is the expression of thought. It relates to what is inmost in men. Consequently, it must endure as long as these men themselves. In other words, it must have the permanence that races possess. It is modified simultaneously with the latter. . . . Therefore, we have reason to believe that we have absolute proof of filiation when we see a complete concordance between linguistic and physical studies."

As early as 1866, Broca, for his part, took a somewhat similar position: "Linguistic characteristics present a remarkable permanence. . . . In many cases, groups based upon linguistics coincide rather precisely with groups based upon the anatomo-physiological study of the human races."

On the other hand, the interdependence of language and of civilization is obvious. The adoption of a new language necessarily implies, owing to the force of circumstances, the adoption of notions which the acquired word signifies—objects, customs, concepts. A word is not only a sound, it has a content regardless of whether it is applied to objects or to ideas.

It seems equally evident that, in order for a people to adopt a new civilization and a new language, the population that speaks the language and possesses the civilization must make an important contribution. It is

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true that other factors play an important role in these substitutions, notably the prestige enjoyed by the people who bestow or impose, in the eyes of the people who receive. But observation of actual facts proves incontestably that this factor of prestige is only of secondary importance. The survival of the Breton and Basque languages and customs, in spite of the unquestionable prestige of the Frenchman, in spite of the influence of the schools and of the barracks, in spite of centralization, in spite of the growth of tourism, is striking evidence that a people relinquishes its language and its civilization only very gradually and because of the constant advent of new elements.

What makes it difficult to demonstrate the harmony that exists in anthropological, cultural, and linguistic data is the fact that the mixture of two populations results in the establishment of an intermediate, hybrid type. This type, thanks to a true fusion, possesses at one and the same time the characteristics of the two component elements; the anthropologist has but inadequate means of disclosing the proportion of these elements and even of revealing their existence. The contacts of civilizations give rise to juxtapositions of cultural phenomena which preserve their individuality and remain identifiable, constituting a kind of mosaic in which the contributions of the two civilizations are represented by little blocks of stone or of enamel or by a tapestry which, from a distance, might give the impression of a blend, but whose specks remain separate. Linguistic phenomena are even more plain. Never, to this day, have we seen hybrid languages established; that is to say, languages whose morphology could be linked simultaneously to those of two languages that clashed. English, which borrowed half of its vocabulary from Romance languages, remains nonetheless a Germanic language because of its structure.

The task of the linguist is therefore easier than that of the ethnographer, and the task of the ethnographer is much easier than that of the anthropologist. At times the anthropologist feels the avenue so blocked that he gives up any attempt to rejoin the ethnologist or the linguist and concludes that the problem he has to resolve is different from that of his colleagues. This is an error.

I will conclude by insisting on a final point. For the ethnologist, whatever his specialty—anthropology, ethnography, sociology, or linguistics—the task of description is far from being finished, but it has evolved sufficiently for the comparative phase to begin. There are, of course, more populations to study, but monographs are now numerous enough and they have been sufficiently probed for researchers to undertake the work

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of synthesis. It is obvious that they must continue to assess the essential traits of the peoples of the earth, but it is indispensable that they bend their efforts more and more, utilizing the basic evidence, to establish their relationships and their filiation. It is no longer only a matter of answering the question: how do such people live? Today one must answer the question, where do these people come from, physically, culturally, and linguistically? Some day we may be able to resolve the problem of their destiny, their future, in terms of their past and their present.

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