

## **JASS forum** **Anthropology and Reductionism**

In this issue the new section **JASS forum** has been included. It contains all the contributions sent to us during the year and which have been already published online at [www.isita-org.com](http://www.isita-org.com).

This initiative is aimed at stimulating discussion on problems of general interest among researchers, practitioners and students across the borders of different anthropological areas. The arguments which will be included in the forum are not always new, but they have been often confined to occasional events, such as conferences, books and monographs. The inclusion of the forum in our Journal is intended not only to make dialogue more interactive but also to generate wider-ranging discussions. Plus, the prompt publication online could facilitate a wide dissemination of the forum and make the discussion more vital.

We have decided to inaugurate the **JASS forum** with a discussion of the relations between Anthropology and Reductionism, using the book “What it means to be 98% chimpanzee” by Jonathan Marks as a primer.

We are all aware of the fact that our discipline is concerned with evolutionary problems where the biological, environmental and cultural dimensions are so tightly linked that sometimes it is difficult to disentangle them. This makes not only an interdisciplinary approach even more necessary and appropriate than for other disciplines, but it also familiarises anthropologists with the holistic concept that “any whole cannot exist and cannot be understood except in their relation to the whole”. However, these features, which make Anthropology so attractive from an intellectual point of view, risk condemning it to oblivion. In fact, it is the complexity itself of the phenomena investigated by anthropologists that makes it difficult to reach straightforward conclusions which, by virtue of their simplicity, might attract the interest of a wide public. This is in sharp contrast with the tendency of other fields of research. I am primarily referring to Genetics and Molecular Biology, or, at least, that part of these disciplines which conceive DNA as an efficient tool reduce biological phenomena to physico-chemical processes. Genetics and Molecular Biology seem to be more and more able to offer simple answers to complex questions, like identifying genetic factors responsible for behavioral aspects or cognitive capabilities. Inevitably, this gives them the advantage of getting the message across to a larger section of our societies. However, there is also a price to pay. In fact, most conclusions of this kind are reached under a very demanding *a priori* assumption, i.e. that complex systems can be completely understood in terms of their simpler components.

But, when all is said and done, is reductionism such a straightforward approach which can be applied to the complexity of human evolutionary history as would seem at first glance? Are there areas of genetic research where there is an attempt to reconcile the seeming linearity of current experimental approaches with non-reductionistic views? What are the risks of Reductionism for Anthropology and Anthropologists? What is the role of a “wide horizon” in stimulating our scientific interests? These are just some of the questions discussed in this part of our forum which I hope you will enjoy reading.

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