

Anthropologists and the glass bead game

Hermann Hesse once described a culture in which the intellectuals retreated to monasteries, gave up contact with the real world and concentrated all their erudite powers on an abstruse and arcane game—the glass bead game. Inputs to the esoteric game were all the elements of culture. Year in and year out the savants of the game would devise intricate stratagems and recondite theories that they would test on each other once a year at their annual intellectual super bowl. Eventually the game became more important than the knowledge it was based on and the intelligentsia floundered when they had to apply their learning to a real-life situation.

Hesse, of course, was warning intellectuals against ivory-towerism. Similar warnings were heard last week when 3,500 anthropologists met in Toronto for the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association (see p. 376). The most sincere warning came from Georges Condominas of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris. Condominas, a French citizen born in Haiphong, with a Vietnamese grandmother, was invited by the AAA to give the annual distinguished lecture.

Describing himself as an old-fashioned participant observer, Condominas decried the current fashion in anthropology to produce something that will make one look like a theoretician. Most of this, he says, turns out to be purely speculative hocus-pocus enveloped in a pretentious and unintelligible jargon. The most important part of an anthropologist's professional life, he says, should be objective observation in the field. His warning to his fellow anthropologists came in the form of a personal example. He told how as a young anthropologist he lived among and observed the Montagnards of Vietnam. His first book, *Nous Avons Mangé la Forêt*, described them. Some years later Condominas learned that a person whose marriage he described in the book had been tortured by a sergeant of the U.S. Special Forces—the Green Berets. A few years after that he learned that

his book had been translated (without anyone's permission) by the U.S. Department of Commerce and distributed to the Green Berets.

"How can one accept," he said, "without trembling with rage that this work, in which I wanted to describe in their human plenitude these men who have so much to tell us about life, should be offered to the technicians of death."

Condominas had no power over how this research was used, but there are some who do have the power and refuse to exert it. Joseph B. Casagrande, president of the AAA, noted that since the 19th century colonial powers have attempted to use anthropologists to gather information to help manage and exploit indigenous peoples. Those who work in this way with governments, says Condominas, dishonor the profession by calling themselves anthropologists. Any well-meaning neutrality of research workers is not enough. Anthropologists, he says, must speak in defense of peoples and societies they are studying—against colonial imperialism. Not being involved in politics, he continues, signifies acceptance of existing injustice.

Condominas' warning against intellectual elitism and noninvolvement is not new and was heard many times at the meeting. Many native American Indians were present to protest their treatment by the United States and Canadian governments. There were at least six three-hour sessions on anthropologists and anti-imperialism. Anthropologists for Radical Political Action and members of Students for a Democratic Society denounced the United States for using anthropologists as informers in Thailand and complained that much anthropology is irrelevant to the contemporary problems of native peoples. Many concluded, like Condominas, that anthropologists will be obliged to "reformulate the ethical foundations of the anthropology profession and even to question the purpose of the profession itself."

the salinity, thickness, roughness and age of sea ice, and the water content of the atmosphere. Results of the experiment may contribute to a better understanding of the interaction of sea ice and atmosphere on the development of weather patterns in the Bering Sea and adjacent areas.

Experimenters hope to acquire more information on the performance of microwave radiometers mounted on aircraft, their relationship to satellite-borne instruments and their operational use in meteorology. The military has been using similar techniques now for years to track submarines. But civilian use is a new science. NASA will be flying a microwave radiometer on Skylab in May.

The U.S.S.R. aircraft will operate from the Anadyr Airport in eastern Siberia and the Convair 990 will be based in Anchorage, Alaska. The Soviet ship will operate in the sea, south of the ice near 179 degrees east longitude and the U.S. Coast Guard ship will operate in the ice between 58 and 63 degrees north latitude and 174 and 178 west longitude. □

Greenland rocks: younger, but still old

The oldest rocks in the world aren't as old as first believed, but they are still pretty old. Early this year, V. R. McGregor of the Geological Survey of Greenland and four researchers from the University of Oxford in England tentatively identified some granitic rocks from the Godthaab district in Greenland as 3.98 billion years old.

Now, McGregor, Stephen Moorbath, R. K. O'Nions, R. B. Pankhurst and N. H. Gale report, in the Nov. 27 NATURE PHYSICAL SCIENCE, the results of a much more detailed collection of rocks from the Godthaab region. The results confirm the great antiquity of the rocks in west Greenland, but require some revision of the dates proposed last February, they conclude. The rocks now appear to be between 3.70 billion and 3.75 billion years old. The 3.98-billion-year age found earlier, they conclude, "must now be regarded as fortuitous," resulting from inadequate sampling. The researchers view

their present results with much more confidence, because the samples came from three different geographic areas and all give essentially the same age range.

The five also reported ages of gneisses from a different region—the Isua area—some 150 kilometers northeast of Godthaab. The researchers are not sure yet how the geology of the Isua area ties in with that of Godthaab, but they have determined that the gneisses at Isua are contemporaneous with certain gneisses of the Godthaab area.

The accumulating evidence of ancient, widespread granitic rocks forces some revisions in theories about development of the earth's crust. Formerly the oldest dated rocks were found in the volcanic greenstone belts of southern Africa, Canada and Australia. Now it appears that a granitic crust formed even earlier in the earth's history. The sequence of events—at least, in Godthaab—appears to have begun with development of a granitic basement. Volcanic rocks of various types then repeatedly erupted or intruded through this crust to accumulate on top. □