

Foundations of Culture: Knowledge-Construction, Belief Systems and Worldview in Their Dynamic Interplay

By Harald Haarmann

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Constructing culture means constructing knowledge and making it operational for the benefit of sustained community life. As a cognitive process, knowledge-construction does not evolve in a vacuum but rather interacts with belief systems and worldview. Cultural knowledge is modulated by key factors such as time (linear versus non-linear), conceptions of reality (physical, imagined, virtual), identity, and intentionality. The critical investigation and comparison of cultures in space and time call for a revision of several concepts. These include utility (as the maxim of modern Euro-American society), prototype (as an allegedly unified concept of culture evolution), and replacement (as a generalizing signifier for the exchange of old items for new ones). The working of cultural memory is understood as the storage capacity of items of knowledge (relating to the past, present and future) according to parameters of experienced rather than absolute time. This study discusses a wide selection of the variables shaping the foundations and fabric of culture, starting with the human capacities for symbol-making and using sign systems. The impact of knowledge-construction on the culture process is articulated in 30 postulates concerning the dynamics of communal life and patterns of sustenance, the relationship between the natural environment and cultural space, and the life cycle of cultures.

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Editorial Review

About the Author
The Author: Harald Haarmann Ph.D., born in 1946, is a German linguist and cultural scientist living and working in Finland. He obtained his Ph.D. in Bonn (1970) and his Habilitation (qualification at professorship level) in Trier (1979). He has taught and conducted research at several German and Japanese universities, and is a member of the Research Centre on Multilingualism in Brussels. Since 2003, he has been Vice-President of the Institute of Archaeomythology (with headquarters in Sebastopol, California) in addition to being director of its European branch (based in Luumäki, Finland). Harald Haarmann is the author of more than 40 books in German, English, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese. Among his awards are the «Prix Logos», 1999 (France), the «American Medal of Honor», 2002 (USA), and the «Plato Award», 2006 (UK).

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