

## Contact Email for October 2016



Yesterday I went to see my doctor who told me that the latest thing in medicine is "Descripting" that is checking a patients scripts to see whether they are being over medicated. I came home and read an article in this week's 'New scientist' about Seshat (the Egyptian goddess of knowledge) but not her so much as the new data base which is using her name to create a social history data base. The compilers say their goal is to test rival social scientific hypotheses with historical and archaeological data. Therefore, the Databank is systematically compiled with information about polities from around the globe. Specify the main theoretical positions and identify empirical patterns in aspects of human history that need to be explained -e.g. the evolution of cooperation among large groups of people, the persistence of certain types of ritual activity, how improvements in people's material well-being occur, etc.. You can read the details at <http://seshatdatabank.info/methods/>. I think it a pity that they are not including Sociological data.

What I got from both of these events is that we ought constantly to look back from where we are, to see how we got where we are, but more importantly let go of thing that might be holding us back. This takes me to Steven Poole's new book, 'Rethink, The surprising History of New Ideas', among other things he points out how an old idea can become relevant again with the discovery of a new piece of the puzzle.

How often in sociology do we pile new theories on top of old ones and assume that we have made progress when in fact we may have lost a great new insight. After I had given a lecture one time, I was asked the dates of my references, when I gave them, I was told "This is rubbish if you can get any new references it not worth listening to." I believe that rather than being rubbish, if you don't review the theories of the past and see what they have to offer, or you don't check that the theories we have now don't contradict each other, then we fail as scholars. The methodology for my Ph.D. I carefully tied back to Ferdinand Tönnies and showed how his ideas could so easily be developed to fit modern research. Not one of my examiners commented on my methodology chapter. I think they were too scared to, because they had never read Tönnies. The best one examiner could do, was to rant that I had used the word 'data' as both singular and plural and didn't I know that datum was the singular. Well I did, in Latin, but English, American and Australian dictionaries since the 1950 had agreed that data could be use as singular or plural which apparently that examiner didn't know.

This all takes me back to my grumbles about the danger of dominant theories. Atomic theory was developed in India in the 6th century BC and again in Greece in the 5th century BC and in both cases the idea was rubbished by holders of the dominant theory. So it wasn't until recent times that the necessary equipment was devised to demonstrate that the theory was true. There are always dominant theories around that need to be challenged.

Next month,(which begins next week), is our annual Conference. I think the Conference does two things for us: first it reminds us that we are not alone and there are many other people, new and old, who we can swap ideas and have a great time, with. Second, it enables us to become aware of the presentation of new work being done across Australia.

The only problem is that one paper you find in a session clashes with another one you want hear at the same time. But then you can go to one then find the presenter of the other one for a chat later. I hope to see you all at my paper on the Thursday afternoon.

*Alan Scott*, Continuing Education Officer.