

Center for Cognitive Science

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Wednesday, October 8, 2003

280 Park Hall

North Campus

2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Phillips Stevens Jr., Ph.D.

Department of Anthropology

University at Buffalo

"The Principles of Magic and Magical Thinking"

Ethnology allows us to identify 6 components of what we can call a magical worldview or magical thinking. The conclusion that at least some of these are universal allows us to look beneath the level of culture for an explanation, as the doctrine of cultural universals has presumed to be reasonable for several decades. Now neuroscience may have provided confirmation for this presumption. Discoveries at UCLA in 1999 and 2001 suggest that one component of magical thinking, the principle of similarity, is fundamental to human cognition, even rooted in neurobiology. Illustrated with slides.

Phillips Stevens, Jr., is Associate Professor of Anthropology. He has conducted fieldwork in West Africa, the Caribbean, and urban areas of North America. He has authored or edited several books and numerous articles in cultural anthropology and African studies, particularly in areas of religion, folklore, and cultural change. In 1993 he received a SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, and in 2000 the UB Student Association gave him a Milton Plesur Award. He is currently working on a major book on the anthropology of magic, sorcery and witchcraft.

Refreshments will be available.

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