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UNH Professor Unites Hard and Soft Sciences in New Book

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DURHAM, N.H.-- Stephen Reyna, professor of anthropology at the University of New Hampshire, has written a book that introduces a groundbreaking social theory on how human beings are connected throughout time.

In "Connections: Brain, mind and culture in a social anthropology," Reyna's string being theory unites two warring intellectual traditions -- hermeneutics, which is a nonscientific literary or "soft" approach, and the "hard" cognitive neuroscience -- to try to understand how the brain, using culture, makes interpretations that lead to actions.

"I'm in the process of trying to create a theory that can be applied to understanding people in all places and in all times," says Reyna, who is also a visiting senior research professor at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany. "My argument is that you have a brain, and that brain allows you to look at what's happened to you and then to react. The brain operates as it is told to by the cultural influences it has been exposed to."

Reyna says his thinking has evolved to try to synthesize art and science.

"I've always thought of anthropology as a science, but I've come to think of science as an art," he says.

Reyna is at work on the second of three books on the string being theory. "The Marriage" looks at why Sept. 11 happened, and "Shifting Sands" will explore how people make explanations.