AN INTRODUCTION TO

Cultural Anthropology

C. NADIA SEREMETAKIS

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To my students
anywhere
anytime

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a comprehensive first part of a particular course in cultural anthropology. It engages young scholars and students in an interdisciplinary, critical dialogue with past and present directions in cultural–historical studies and disciplines. More specifically, it prepares prospective anthropologists, as well as interested readers in human cultures, for understanding key theoretical and methodological ethnographic principles and pursuing further what has been known as cultural anthropological perspectives.

This book was generated out of course lectures in two continents over the past three decades. Both the choice and analysis of materials, focusing on various parts of the world as researched and studied by prominent scholars, were adopted to the occasional needs of students, beginners and/or advanced. They were also (re)formulated to meet the teaching and learning needs of young scholars or teachers of anthropology proper in European and those neocolonial settings in which academic anthropology, since its importation, has been limited to a British–oriented "social anthropology," thus, leaving cultural anthropology and its history—especially the critical decades of the 1980s and 1990s—an underexplored and often unknown territory. In this sense, the present volume also adds a significant missing part in the discipline's trajectory beyond its birthplaces.

The content of this volume is not an exhaustive introduction to the discipline, nor does it present in a developmental sequence all central issues and theories of and in cultural anthropology proper. Rather, it is a contextually presented and critically analyzed background reading of relational material—a background necessary for a better understanding of significant contemporary and future ethnographic studies in anthropology, in particular, and cultural studies, in general.

The representative works of influential field researchers and thinkers discussed include a wide range of cultural and social anthropologists, ethnologists, historians, philosophers, literary critics, folklorists, ethnomusicologists, sociolinguists, poets, and photographers/visual artists.

Through their fieldwork-based or/and theoretical studies, the engaged reader travels to cultures and parts of the world, such as Africa (South and West), the Amazon (Indians), contemporary America, Aboriginal Australia, Egypt, Europe (modern and late medieval), France (modern and early modern), Greece (modern, Ancient Greece, and Classical Athens), Ireland (Tory Island), Indonesia, Latin America, Malaysia, India, Sicily, the Mediterranean (16th c.), Melanesia (New Guinea), Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sweden.

The scholars discussed include *(listed alphabetically)*

Lila **Abu-Lughod**, Philippe **Ariès**, Mikhail **Bakhtin**, Richard **Bauman**, Ruth **Behar**, Walter **Benjamin**, Ernst **Bloch**, Maurice **Bloch**, Franz **Boas**, Fernand **Braudel**, Susan **Buck-Morss**, Constantine **Cavafy**, James **Clifford,** Jean and John **Comaroff,** Alain **Corbin**, Salvatore **Cucchiari,** Loring **Danforth**, Stanley **Diamond**, Page **duBois**, Juliet **Du Bouley**, Jill **Dubisch**, Mary **Douglas,** Jeanne **Favret-Sada**, Steven **Feld**, Allen **Feldman**, Robin **Fox**, Michel **Foucault**, Jean **Franco**, Ernestine **Friedl**, Jonas **Frykman**, Clifford **Geertz**, Faye **Ginsburg,** Erving **Goffman,** Robert **Hertz,** Michael **Herzfeld**, Renée **Hirschon**, David **Howes**, Richard **Huntington**, Dell **Hymes,** Michael **Jackson,** Roman **Jacobson,** Fredric **Jameson**, Roger **Keesing**, Reinhart **Kosseleck**, Emmanuel Le Roy **Ladurie**, Edmund **Leach,** Claude **Levi-Strauss**, Shirley **Lindenbaum,** Orvar **Lofgren,** Nicole **Loraux,** Catharine **Lutz,** Charles **Lyell,** Bronislaw **Malinowski,** Marcel **Mauss**, Marshall **McLuhan**, Peter **Metcalf**, Fred **Myers**, Aihwa **Ong,** Jonathan **Parry,** Sarah **Pink,** Karl **Polanyi**, Rayna **Reiter** (Rapp), Renato **Rosaldo,** Jerome **Rothenberg**, Jean-Jacques **Rousseau**, Edward **Sapir,** David **Schneider,** C. Nadia **Seremetakis,** Herbert **Spencer,** Paul **Stoller**, Andrew **Strathern**, Marilyn **Strathern**, Michael **Taussig,** E.P. **Thompson,** Alexander **Tsiaras,** Victor **Turner**, Stephen **Tyler,** Arnold **Van Gennep**, Jean Pierre **Vernant,** Pierre **Vidal-Naquet,** Wilhelm **Von Humboldt,** Immanuel **Wallerstein**, Annette **Weiner,** Benjamin Lee **Whorf,** Eric **Wolf**, and Natalie **Zemon-Davis**. (For a full list, see Author Index)

Readings, a bibliographical list of the specific materials discussed, is featured at the end of each chapter and/or section. *Notes*, including the biographical notes of the scholars and authors mentioned, follows *Readings*.

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PART I:

EXPLORING CULTURES

CHAPTER ONE

REDEFINING CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION: THE BIRTH OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Culture is the subject matter of anthropology.

The birth of anthropology as a professional field of study occurred in the second half of the 19th century. The intellectual climate of the time was characterized by a) evolutionary speculation, b) the triumphant achievements of the natural sciences, and c) Western hegemony in world affairs. It is in this context that the concept of culture initially developed and was redefined by and in anthropology.

The anthropological concept of culture can best be understood in relation to that of civilization. The notion of "civilizing" had already been known since the 18th century. The term referred to the concept of bringing people into a social organization. *Civil* meant orderly, educated, and polite, and it rested on *civis* and *civitas,* extending to civil society. But in the 19th century, **civilization**—a new word, expressing the modern concept—began to mean something more than this, something different. It meant an achieved state of development and, thus, could be contrasted to barbarism, its opposite. It pointed to a secular process of development, which implied progress: a historical process that culminated in an achieved state, its ultimate goal. That ultimate state was the metropolitan civilization of England and France (as the true inheritors of the Greco-Roman civilization) (1). This was the historical rationality of the Enlightenment (2).

French and English social theorists understood the history of society as a progressive development from simple to more complex levels of organization and functioning. For example, they talked of the "primal horde," the supposedly original prehistoric collectivity from which all subsequent human society emerged and evolved—a collectivity characterized by the absence of the division of labor, gender roles, and social institutions, such as the family. From this homogeneous collectivity, society developed in progressive stages of complexity and differentiation,

forming, for instance, the division of labor, religious belief systems, technological development, and the appearance of the state. That is to say, society progressed from simple to complex, from homogeneous to heterogeneous.

Thus, Western European society, comprised of urban, bourgeois, and technological society and controlled by centralized states, became the single standard by which all other societies were to be measured and evaluated. Societies that had not reached this stage of European civilization were seen as backward, late starters, sluggish, or incapable of this organic development, this natural social evolution toward the European ideal.

Yet, these theories of historical social evolution were conjectural, hypothetical. They needed scientific legitimacy. This legitimacy was attained by Charles Darwin's theories of biological evolution in the 19th century. The idea of social evolution, which already existed at that time, gained scientific validity when Darwin published his *Origins of the Species* in 1859, arguing for natural selection (3).

In social sciences and popular conceptions, society was but a continuation of the natural world. It was perceived as a huge biological organism, and the individuals within society, with their sexual and occupational differentiations, were the various parts of the body. Coordinated, these parts contributed to the functioning of the organic whole.

What came to be known as sociobiology later was based on the premise that the inclinations of human social behavior are expressions of the needs and drives of the human organism and such propensities have been constructed in human nature in the course of biological evolution. Social organization, thus, was but the behavioral outcome of the interaction of organisms that have biologically fixed inclinations.

From the smuggling of Charles Darwin's biological theories to the history of society [see Herbert Spencer (4)], two crucial ideas emerged and/or were reinforced: The idea that came to be known as social Darwinism and the aristocratic notion of culture.

Social Darwinism consisted of the various attempts to transfer biological laws into the socioeconomic sphere and to draw parallelisms between biological and social evolution. As a political doctrine, social Darwinism reinforced popular beliefs in the racial superiority of the Europeans. European society was an expression of the European superior biological

status as compared to Third World societies. In short, if social behavior and organization is an expression of our biology, the fact that Europeans were thought to have the most complex organization proved their biological superiority.

Moreover, social Darwinism, in its popularized form, applied theories of genetic superiority *within* European society when theorizing about peasants, lower social classes, the poor, the criminals, the insane, and women.

Thus, the aristocratic notion of culture was a direct result of social Darwinism. The notion of unilinear evolutionary development culminating in the current stage of European society contributed to the equation of culture with civilizational attainment, education, social graces, and manners. Consequently, the lower social orders were denied any real culture of their own. They were the Other in society. They had, therefore, to be controlled, monitored, and domesticated by social institutions of enforcement, such as the church, the patriarchal family, law agencies, houses for the poor, mental institutions, and prisons.

As previously mentioned, the intellectual climate of the time in which anthropology developed was characterized—aside from evolutionary speculation— by the triumphant achievements of the natural sciences, i.e., geology and biology. Consider, for example, Charles Lyell's (5) stratigraphic geology, restructuring the time depth of the earth and postulating evolutionary morphological principles, and Darwin's work on the adaptation of species to particular econiches, posing as a dynamic of evolutionary development. These achievements were coupled by significant archaeological discoveries. The historical framework and reality within which ideas were developed at the time included archaeological discoveries in the Middle East, which facilitated an awareness of the origins of human settlement and culture, and the communal origins of societies. In addition, all of the above factors coincided with a Western hegemony in world affairs: Europe expanded to the non-European world to spread civilization. The spread of colonialism, as Europeans discovered new territories and cultures, created the conditions for the comparative awareness of European state systems and non-European stateless societies. This was the context in which the term and concept of culture developed initially.

As we saw already, culture was associated with the progressive accumulation of the characteristic manifestations of human creativity, such as art, science, knowledge, refinement, and good manners. But civilization also

meant the achievement of these values. Culture, therefore, and civilization were interchangeable terms. They both meant cultivation, or, in other words, that which separates and frees people from the control of nature, one's physical environment, instinct, reflex, or habit. More precisely, they meant a progressive move away from a primitive state of nature and toward a civilizational state that is the end point of natural development. In this schema, instinct, custom, and temperament were associated with tradition. Thus, tradition became identified with a lower evolutionary status (often described in racial terms).

In this context, how would one study society and culture?

Since one's theoretical view affects and determines one's methodology and vice versa, the believers of a unilinear evolutionary movement of history and society would take elements from different cultures and, per their similarities, they would arrange them in evolutionary sequences. This is something one could easily do from his/her office or library. This method has been known as **the taxonomic comparative methodology.** Simply put, it is the extrapolation of evolutionary stages out of every area of cultural life—e.g., stages in the development of myth, religion, language, art, and marriage forms—and the outcome of it is a construction of universal evolutionary stages through which each society must pass to reach the stage of civilization. Today, we encounter the same mythology, but new technology is the prime criterion of developmental and civilizational attainment.

■

Cultural anthropology was born as a reaction against this cultural evolutionism of the 19th century. The first major reaction came from the American school of anthropology and was initiated by Franz Boas (6) around the turn of the 19th century. Ever since, Boas has been considered to be the father of anthropology.

Boas separated the concept of culture from that of civilization. He asserted that culture is *not* singular, moving along evolutionary lines to culminate in European civilization. Culture is plural; it refers to the cultures of individual human groups. There are many cultural realities and experiences, and none has a moral superiority over the others. Thus, he relativized and pluralized the concept of culture. All societies have their own integral and internal histories and patterns of development. The European historical development is only one possibility among many

others that have occurred. This is Boas' well-known notion of **cultural pluralism and relativism** (7). The abandonment of the notion of a single standard, by which all other cultures are evaluated, meant that stateless societies could no longer be mere transitional phases in an evolutionary teleology. They gained contemporary validity.

At the heart of that approach of cultural pluralism, relativism, and imbrication he termed diffusion lies Boas' principle of cultural **self-reflexivity**:

> The crucial notion of self-reflexivity in anthropology aims at exploring the epistemological dynamics of the researchers' own cultural background when confronted with a cultural and historical difference in the fieldwork situation, be that next door or far away. It is in these cross cultural situations, that decenter identities and break down social and historical presuppositions, that culture as form reaches its highest visibility. (8) (Seremetakis 2017)

In this sense, Boas followed Rousseau who, in the era of European colonialism, urged Europeans to travel out and to discover other forms of society—this contained the possibility of moving back into time and, thus, discovering the origin of European society. He called for a cross-cultural exploration, urging Europeans to empirically study non-European societies as a search for self-discovery, a discovery of those parts of their human identity that had been subordinated in the process leading to civilization. Rousseau was himself a severe critic of civilization (see Levi-Strauss on Rousseau, 1963).

Jean Jacques Rousseau (9) was a philosopher and theorist who based his thoughts on the recognition of the decentering of European society. He saw the discovery of the New World, the colonial enterprise, and the opening of trade routes to other societies as an historical opportunity to build a more complete knowledge of humanity. Thus, Rousseau introduced one of the **primary motifs of anthropology**: that of travel, of movement in space and time as metaphors of decentering. One moves from a center into the unknown. He combined this process of travel and decentering with the task of writing reportage, a representation of the experiences of the traveler in terms of what he saw, felt, and experienced. For Rousseau, the purpose of the journey into the unknown and its transformation into a text was not to make the unknown world an object of knowledge, but rather, to acquire a clearer view of European people. One was supposed to observe not only others, but oneself, while

observing others. This fundamental relation of self and other was a configuration that enacted the experience of decentering and generated the knowledge that came from this experience. Thus, Rousseau anticipated the anthropological concept of self-reflexivity. He felt that, for the study of Man as a universal category and the study of one's self, a process of distancing had to be effected. Distancing via the study of the self through the observation of the Other was the primary mechanism for escaping what, later in anthropology proper, would be termed ethnocentrism (10).

Ethnocentrism is defined in anthropology as the *belief* that one group's physical characteristics, language, religion, and way of life are the only natural and absolute forms, thus, superior to all others. Indeed, all others are represented as inferior or negative phenomena. Ethnocentrism as *practice* is the imposition of one's cultural values on another (see, for example, Nazism in history) (11).

Rousseau was aware of the extent to which colonization involved the domination of one society by another, which is why he even refused to classify monkeys and apes as nonhuman. But the colonization of Europe and the creation of European empires provided the social conditions for the development of the 19th century anthropology that saw the colonial relations of Europe to other countries as a demonstration of its superiority. **Although scientists no longer believed that history and society followed the blueprint written by God, they used their growing knowledge of physics and biology to substitute the law of nature for the law of God.** Societies were seen as obeying natural laws and the mechanical causalities of nature based on the study of anatomy, chemistry, botany, and animal behavior provided the methods for studying human societies. The fundamental principle that animated most of 19th century social thought was that the development of human society, as in nature, could be described as a movement from the simple to the complex, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous.

■

Fieldwork versus Comparative Taxonomic Methodology

As Boas stated, biology is one thing we all share, but we do not all share historical development. From the moment we start talking of historical development, we free ourselves from biological determinism (12).

Therefore, Boas juxtaposed the historical method to the 19th century comparative taxonomic methodology (13). He claimed that those taxonomies and classifications were very simplistic. The apparently similar phenomena that the evolutionists classified were, in fact, the products of very different historical processes. The similarity, then, of their cause cannot be assumed. Moreover, to place phenomena into an evolutionary sequence, the evolutionists removed them from their immediate social context. The comparative method does not only create classifications to compare similar phenomena, but in fact, aims at predicting. In 19th century thought, race (i.e., physical characteristics), language, and culture were seen as having a one-to-one relation—as being interdependent. In other words, the stage or level of development of a specific society could be assessed by its physical typology. Thus, this society's linguistic and cognitive sophistication could be predicted.

We can understand the implications of this thinking when applied to women and other so-called inferior groups within European society.

Boas demonstrated, via **extensive field researches,** that there was no connection between racial physical characteristics and linguistic stages or cultural complexity. He encountered societies sharing the same linguistic base, but different cultural patterns (i.e., folklore and mythology) and tribes that shared common cultural patterns, but used very different dialects (i.e., they had languages of different levels of organizational complexity). Moreover, he showed that, in many cases, the development of language proceeded historically from more complex to simpler forms, rather than the opposite.

Boas then separated "society" from "nature" and culture from biological determinism. (Marx did this earlier, from a different theoretical framework.) If the 19th century theorists biologized cultural forms (including the conception of women), Boas culturalized what was previously seen only as biological. We can think, for example, of the difference between the biological experience of birth and the social experience of raising a child, or of sex as procreation versus sex as pleasure.

This major contribution of Boas, combined with his idea of cultural plurality, the equal relevance of cultural realities, opened the theoretical door for the development of **gender studies**—the analysis of gender differences, behaviors, and roles not solely rooted in physical typology, but formed by culture, through cultural representation and imagery.

It is important to note that here lies the difference between Boas and more contemporary anthropological gender studies. The latter no longer see the 19th and 20th century biologization of culture merely as a scientific error, but as a product of historically determined political ideologies and social institutions.

Boas' historical method is based on the premise that one should look at cultural phenomena, customs, and practices within the sociohistorical context of each culture to determine the forces—environmental, social, psychological, and historical—that have shaped those customs and given them the form and content they now have. Therefore, for Boas, the way to study other cultures is by fieldwork. (Fieldwork as participant observation is discussed in Chapter 2.)

■

Diffusion or Independent Invention?

To study a culture or a cultural group on its own terms does not mean studying it independently from external forces. For Boas, cultures do not exist self-sufficiently, in isolation. This begs the question: how are new ideas, behaviors, and beliefs produced? Are they simply invented by individuals? The evolutionists saw human creativity in the form of independent invention. Boas, instead, spoke of **diffusion.**

The diffusion of cultural elements over vast geographical distances was well documented already. Boas was interested in the dynamic in which new ideas and behaviors external to a society were adopted and modified according to already existing patterns (14).

He centered his critique of independent invention on the idea that civilization is not the product of the genius of a single people; there is a diffusion of cultural elements. The important issue is how these new elements are adopted, modified, or rejected by the different cultures.

In contrast to the evolutionary ideology—the perfect legitimizer of colonialism—that assumed that cultural stages were associated with innate intelligence levels of specific peoples, Boas asserted that history and historical events have greater influence in the development of complex forms. There is nothing in history to assume, he stated, that one race is more gifted than the other or one cultural group is more gifted than

another. Indeed, there are many cultural realities and experiences, and none of them has any moral superiority over the others.

■

Acculturation

Boas' concept of diffusion is closely associated with his concept of enculturation, or acculturation: the transmission and dissemination of behavioral patterns, styles of thinking, language, and belief systems. He connected acculturation with learning theory.

For the 19th century evolutionists, acculturation was associated with the various developmental stages of society, i.e., the movement from savagery to barbarism to civilization. Inherited cultural material was seen as survivals from the past that would eventually disappear.

Boas, instead, considered the process of acculturation, by which cultural traits were selected, included, or excluded, as one that can occur between different cultures and between generations within a single culture as a form of unconscious imitation. **Culture is the unconscious determinant of human behavior.**

The process of enculturation becomes clear when we deal with the treatment of folklore. Boas considered **folklore** to be a formal body of historically conditioned knowledge, of inherited knowledge that ultimately determined collective behavior in primitive societies by reinforcing social institutions.

His view is contrasted to that of the 19th century theorists who saw folklore as a dysfunctional survival that was once integrated with society but no longer is. Boas saw the study of folklore as the study of all the manifestations of popular life. In this sense, Boas perceived the culture of advanced civilization, governed by tradition and habit, as tradition. For him, **science in the civilized world functions as analogous to mythology in primitive society** (his concept of cultural relativism).

By extension, human creativity is not a function of natural law, nor is Man an inventor, as 19th century theorists claimed. Humans are imaginative and manipulative reinterpreters of the given conditions of their existence.

Culture as Process

Boas argued that, to understand a cultural trait (behavior, belief, symbol, etc.), one must examine it in its local context. But as people migrate from one place to another, and as cultural context changes over time, the elements of a culture and their meaning also change. Therefore, Boas emphasized the importance of local histories for the understanding and analysis of any culture.

This attention to history, which reveals the extent to which traits diffuse from one place to another, led Boas to see cultural boundaries as permeable—at a time that other anthropologists, like Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown (15) (of the British school of anthropology) perceived and treated societies as clearly bounded.

In later years, though, the definitions of culture varied in the Boasian school of thought. For example, in the first half of the 20th century, emphasis was placed on learned and accumulated experience that was seen as habitual. Thus, the parent–child relation and processes of socialization became of focus for the **Culture and Personality** school of thought, to which famous anthropologists, like Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Gregory Bateson (16) belonged. One could schematically say that there were two basic definitions of and approaches to culture that were either mixed or kept separate: the ideational, or cognitive, and the adaptive. The former focused on linguistics, symbolic systems, ritual performances and systems of cognition and classification. It was concerned with culture as a system of meanings, knowledge, ideas, and beliefs that organize people's perceptions and representational and experiential realities; it was a communicative model of culture. The latter claimed that ideational systems and shared meanings arise and develop in certain biological–ecological constraints that differ from one historical period and society to another; the interplay between these elements produces cultural diversity. The materialist and structuralist–marxist perspectives later complemented these approaches (see Marvin Harris and Maurice Godelier, respectively) (17). In response, and drawing on the critical tradition of Rousseau and Boas, Stanley Diamond and others called for a dialectical–critical anthropology and approach to culture that aimed at explicating, through the primitives' perspective, the deficiencies of modern civilization.

Neither one of these perspectives encompasses all the varied concerns, which have enriched the anthropological quest throughout the history of the discipline. The dialogical quest for understanding culture continues.

A Four-Field Discipline

The historical development of the Boasian concept of culture became an anchoring principle of the **four-field approach** in American ethnological theory. The four fields were cultural anthropology, physical–biological anthropology, anthropological linguistics, and archaeology. In the late 19th century and the 20th century, the study of the cultures of people, past and present, necessitated the merging of these disparate concerns. Thus, anthropology has traditionally been considered a four-field discipline, promoting the necessity for **interdisciplinarity.** However, in the over-specialized late 20th century, the tendency was to create subfields, each one of which, independent of the others, developed into a distinct academic discipline. Today that interdisciplinarity is a must in academia worldwide, the Boasian vision has become most pertinent.

■

Social or Cultural Anthropology?

Culture and society are two aspects of the same totality, often artificially abstracted from each other in most analyses. *Society*, in this case, refers to the institutions—religious, economic, familial—through which systems of shared meanings are implemented and from which systems of shared meanings may arise. Thus, society is defined as a social system marked by territorial separation and shared language and culture. Society is an aggregate of people who interact with each other. If culture, then, is a system of shared meanings that allows interaction to take place, society can be seen as the total pattern of all such interactions.

As a model of this, we can use the symphony or orchestra in our society [originally discussed by Roger Keesing (1981)]. An orchestra is a hierarchical social structure with systems of command, obedience, an allocation of roles, and a division of labor. The leader is the conductor, and, in turn, the orchestra is divided into sections, such as string, woodwinds, bass, and percussions. Each of these sections produces different tonality and contributes to the total sound in a different manner. This can be seen as a division of labor between the conductor and the orchestra and between the different sections in it. There is also a division within each section of the orchestra, such as between the first and second

violin and the rest of the strings. Yet, although we can describe the arrangement and divisions in the orchestra, the different roles, tasks, duties, and obligations that each section performs, and even the potential sounds it can produce, this analysis will tell us absolutely nothing about what music is played by the orchestra. For that, we need the musical score and the musical codes, which are equivalent to the cultural codes in the same way that the social organization of the orchestra is equivalent to the social structure.

In short, neither the music nor the organization of the orchestra, taken separately, fully describes what a symphony orchestra does and sounds like.

The symphony orchestra is a particular type of social institution in our society. It has its own history, and its beginning was in the 19th century. But the orchestra can be placed in a relation to other social institutions, such as a record corporation and the economic organization of society and, in turn, it can be compared with institutional arrangements, such as hospitals, schools, and prisons.

■

The distinction between culture and social structure characterized the differences between American and British schools of anthropology.

So far, we discussed the American definition of culture as influenced by Boas. What was the focus of the British school?

The British School emphasized social structure, law, political organization, and rules. This led the school to emphasize the role of kinship in the societies under study, primarily Africa.

It descended from Durkheimian sociology, which had two lineages: the British social anthropology and the French social anthropology that was differentiated from French ethnology. The social structure, kinship, or class is analyzed as a law-making and -enforcing structure.

Levi-Strauss' structuralism attempted to synthesize the ethnological and the social anthropological perspectives by treating kinship elements as analogous to linguistic structures; but his stress on language preserved the notion of a formal arrangement that could accommodate multiple content. The American and Australian Melanesianists, however, asserted that kinship structures were malleable; they were symbolic images that could

be redefined or adapted to particular circumstances. In short, they were not inherently stable structures, but shifting performative metaphors. (Melanisianists are discussed in Chapter 10.)

Contemporary British-oriented schools of anthropology define social anthropology as the science that has studied "social forms" in small-scale societies by utilizing practical, empirical methods to investigate philosophical problems about the nature of human life and society. Renowned anthropologists of the British school of thought, like Bronislaw Malinowski, Marcel Mauss, Evans-Pritchard, and Lévi-Strauss, have contributed with distinctive theoretical approaches within the social sciences. Moreover,

> Since the 1960s, social anthropology has extended the scope of its empirical investigations to communities anywhere; it has moved from rural locations to include towns and cities; it grapples with issues of global impact on local society and the workings of states, the politics of nationalism and ethnicity, the operations of international bodies, the world religions, conflict and violence, and the powerful communication media. It some ways its research has become more like that of the mainstream social sciences.…The writing of ethnography too is understood to have a very subjective quality. At the same time, academic social anthropology retains its older, and fundamental, scientific and comparative attitude…" (Social Anthropology, para. X.) (18)

Seremetakis (2016, 2017) has pointed out that, today, under the pressures of globalization, there is a tendency to blur the distinction of the terms social anthropology and cultural anthropology in Europe. Yet, the blurring of terms does not eradicate the ideological structures that gave birth to them. This becomes more evident in areas outside the birthplaces of anthropology proper, in areas where anthropology, as an academic discipline, was imported. In Greek social anthropology, for example, this is evident in the binarisms that have dominated theory and method, such as rural/urban, everyday social life/high arts; in the tendency towards a Greek centrism; in the specific views of written and oral history promoted or eliminated; in the inability to theorize about modernity as nonanthropologists have done; in the writing styles; and in the translation of basic anthropological terms (See also notes 8 and 11 of this chapter).

Furthermore, the abandonment of the interdisciplinarity of the Boasian approach in favor of the British-influenced sociologizing, scientific, and

comparative perspectives has contributed to the marginalization of the various anthropologies as academic disciplines in the context of the humanities and beyond. It has certainly kept anthropology apart from the arts and visual culture, literature, and history for far too long.

It is no coincidence that Jay Ruby (19) has remarked

> Clearly it is not an overstatement to suggest that Franz Boas should be regarded as a father figure in visual anthropology. He is at least partially responsible for making picture-taking a normative part of the anthropologist's field experience, a characteristic which has distinguished us from other students of the human condition...Boas was an early proponent of the study of dance and body movement as culture…[his fieldworks were] among the earliest researches to use a camera to study dance, to record dance in film for possible Labanotation (20) analysis…. (Ruby 1980, p. 7)

As Boas himself stated,

> Song and dance accompany all the events of Kwakiutl life…everyone is obliged to take part in the singing and dancing, so that the separation between performer and audience that we find in our modern society does not occur in primitive societies such as that represented by the Kwakiutl Indians. (21)

Finally, it is important to note that the recent interest of American anthropology in "public anthropology," concerning the discipline's interface with the public and the broadening of its audiences beyond academia, is also informed by Boas' stance that anthropologists should speak out on current public issues. He spoke in conferences and wrote in newspapers extensively on major issues of his time, such as racial inequality and domination of one state by another. It is widely admitted that Boas did more than anyone else in history to combat racial prejudice (22).

■

Defining Culture

Recapitulating the above analysis, **culture** is defined as the meaning systems and codes that inform and organize the experience of everyday life. In contrast to the 19th century concept of culture as civilizational

attainment, the anthropological model of culture is pluralistic, mundane, and democratic. Culture is equated with the tools and conscious or unconscious means people use to make meaning out of and in their day-to-day existence, and to use these meaning systems to construct or continue social relations. Thus, **culture is both symbolic and material.** It is comprised of interpretive practices, and **it is *poesis***—in the Greek sense of the term, as both making and imagining (Seremetakis 1991). In this sense, culture is not singular; many cultures coexist in the same national and social spaces.

Meaning-making practices and codes are both inherited and emerging, both global and local, both imposed from above and emerging from the ground up, and both mental and material. What is retained is the notion of everyday life, of the social organization of meaning, and the fact that this is often unconscious, unexamined, habitual, or autonomized (as in the case of mass media). Everyday life is comprised of practices and terrains of sense-making that exceed national, ethnic, and even linguistic boundaries.

Examples of meaning systems, codes, and meaning-making practices include spatial structures, cognitive maps, soundscapes, techniques of the body, language, visual communication, gestures, material culture, memory-bearing artifacts, and built environment.

In conclusion, the separation of social structure and culture is a common fallacy, for **social structure is only realized as the material effects that must be symbolically analyzed. Symbolic systems are mnemotechniques, complex valuations of residual historical experience that reconstruct and reproduce the social structure on a day-to-day basis.**

■

The concept of culture in relation to that of civilization is a broader concept and idea. **By transposing culture to multiple forms of everyday life, practices, expressions, and social institutions, Boas democratized, pluralized, and relativized the concept. Culture came to signify a much broader and historically deeper sphere of human activity than that of civilization** (23).

Civilization is historically identified with state systems and involves a particular social organization, such as legal systems and bureaucracies. Civilization has been associated with cities, towns, and plains. In contrast, culture can exist outside of civilization; it does not necessitate formal

institutions, such as the state. Culture is plural: it refers to **cultures of individual groups.**

A common, popularized definition of culture is "a way of life," that is, how people live and what their worldview is. But this is a rather abstract and simplistic definition. One needs to look at power relations in a culture. Culture also relates to ecology and political economy—there are political, economic, and geographical structures (i.e., oceans and mountain ranges) that have a determining influence on a multiplicity of societies, cultures, ethnic-linguistic groups, and even states (24).

Cavafy (25) has eloquently demonstrated this juxtaposition of culture to civilization in his poem "Waiting for the Barbarians." In many ways, Cavafy could be a father figure in modern Greek anthropology.

Waiting for the Barbarians

by *Cavafy*

What are we waiting for, assembled in the *agora*?

The barbarians are to arrive today.

Why this inaction in the senate?
Why aren't the senators passing laws?

Because the barbarians are to arrive today
What laws can the senators make now?
Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating.

Why did our emperor get up so early,
why is he sitting at the city's main gate
on his throne, in state, wearing the crown?

Because the barbarians are to arrive today
and the emperor is waiting to receive their chief.
He has even prepared a scroll to give him,
full of impressive titles and imposing names.

Why did our two consuls and praetors come out today
wearing their embroidered scarlet togas?
Why did they put on bracelets with so many amethysts,
and rings with sparkling precious emeralds?
Why do they carry today impressive canes
beautifully decorated with silver and gold?

Because the barbarians are arriving today
and things like that dazzle the barbarians.

Why don't our distinguished orators come forward as usual
to make their speeches, say what they have to say?

Because the barbarians are coming today
and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking.

Why this sudden restlessness, this confusion?
(How solemn people's faces have become.)
Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,
everyone going home so deep in thoughts?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians have not come.
And some who have just returned from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.

And now, what will become of us without barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution. (26)

■

Cavafy, in this poem, draws the opposition between the civilized Polis and its Other, the Barbarians. In his first verses, he defines Polis as a specific system of organization, characterized by social stratification, bureaucracy, written laws, and commodification, and concerned with status. In contrast, the Barbarians are outside this system.

Thus, the senators of the Polis pass laws, but laws stop when the Barbarians arrive. The Polis has an emperor, while the Barbarians have a chief. The emperor has prepared titles for their reception, for the Polis is concerned with status. The authorities are dressed up, displaying the wealth of the Polis, for the Polis is concerned with wealth and appearance. But these things simply dazzle the Barbarians; they have no economic value for them. The speakers of the Polis remain silent, for the Barbarians are not logocentric; they are bored with volubility.

Cavafy is critical of the notion of the nation state. His last verses are sarcastic: Barbarians never existed; they are the creation of the Polis. In short, if you step outside the boundaries of the Polis, you see there are no Barbarians. Their imaginary construction, however, is "a solution," for the identity of the people of the Polis is tied to that of the Barbarians. To define themselves as civilized, they must construct their opposite, the barbaric. Or, as Michel Foucault (25) later stated, reason has always defined itself by that which is unreason, by the irrational.

The crucial issue that Cavafy raises is that, if we look at what is excluded, we see more clearly that which is included.

We, therefore, must always question how we decide what we want to know. For example, Neohellenists in Greece decided they wanted to know what could be traced back to ancient Greece; thus, whatever they could not trace back was not meaningful. Very often, we find meaningful that which is verifiable (that which can be proven, a fact). This is, perhaps, a reason why textual tradition has been historically preferred than oral culture (i.e., peasant culture). Also, Polis/nonPolis and Hellenes/Barbarians are models of membership. Membership in the Neohellenic tradition was reserved for those who spoke a certain type of Greek, who had access to a certain textual tradition. Here, sociologists would remind us that this process of knowledge is not devoid of certain political and socio-economic interests.

Another example is post-revolution France, with its imposition via state institutions, such as schools, of a uniform dialect of French speaking and writing on various regional groups that had previously used their own French dialects. Immanuel Wallerstein (26) saw this process as a political one by which the "core," the state bureaucracies centered in Paris, colonized the "peripheries," the rural regions. His thesis has been that the core/periphery relation was the basis for nation-building in Europe, where peripheries were identified as a political creation of the center. However, more recent theories debate this dualistic model of analysis prevalent at

the time and point to the coexistence of multiple temporalities, spatialities, and processes of mediation.

Readings

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Notes

(1) France was the most powerful country in the 18th century, but in the early 19th century, it was replaced by England, which was the most economically developed and urbanized country at the time. Greece was under Turkish occupation. In those metropoles, the Greek intelligentsia, which later forged the Neohellenic revival, studied and/or was influenced by the 18th century Enlightenment.

(2) The rise of the Enlightenment philosophy, with its emphasis on evolutionary paradigms, scientific rationality, and civilizational values, also gave rise to the rediscovery of archaic Greek culture and the development of the Neohellenic perspective, based on which, Greece was both a source of western civilization and the current recipient of the new dominant forces of western civilization (England and France). Two strategies of nation-building arose in Greece at that time: Neohellenic, based on the mercantile elite and Romeic, rooted in the upper peasantry, which had achieved economic benefits due to the break between Ottoman feudalism and the church. This reinforced its political nationalistic role in reaction to the weakening of the Ottoman government and political structures. The Hellenic/Romeic identity in modern Greece has also been discussed effectively by Michael Herzfeld (see Chapter 14).

(3) In Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, organic forms move from simple to complex structures. This is stimulated by the interaction with the environment and selective adaptation. The forms that could locate or develop specialized niches within which to survive (in symbiosis with other aspects of the ecology) usually underwent a process of gradual physiological transformation in order to facilitate the exploitation of their ecozone. The more specialized the environment, the more adaptation and, thus, more complex structure. Those species that could not make the adaptation to particular econiches could not guarantee the reproduction of their gene pool, and thus, they died out. This theory was later transformed into "the survival of the fittest," a competition theory, by others. The expression "survival of the fittest" is credited to Herbert Spencer (4).

(4) Herbert Spencer (1820-1903): English philosopher and biologist. Best known for the expression "survival of the fittest," which he coined in his book *Principles of Biology* (1864) after the publication of Darwin's *On the Origins of the Species.*

(5) Charles Lyell (1797-1875): British geologist.

(6) Franz Boas (1858-1942): German-American cultural anthropologist. Pioneer of modern anthropology. Known as the father of anthropology.

(7) We must distinguish between relativism as a moral judgment and relativism as an analytic tool. For instance, students often pose the question *But how can we apply cultural relativism to Hitler's case?* Analysis helps one to reach a more mature understanding; to start with a moral judgment will prevent a good analysis. The only people who first resisted Hitler were those who had earlier experiences with Nazism—e.g., the Spanish civil war—that is, they knew its internal dynamics. Put differently, they had an experience from within, and so, a better understanding of it (this is the idea of relativism). To reach morality through knowledge and science is a western concept and need.

(8) It is worth noting here that the translative distortion of such key anthropological terms as self-reflexivity in other languages and cultures where anthropology, as an academic discipline, has been imported reveals the limited and/or selective knowledge and transmission of the history of ideas in the discipline outside its birthplaces. In Greece, for instance, self-reflexivity has been transferred as *rereflecting* and *rethinking*, meaning a distanced meditation upon a theoretical object. What has been eliminated is the self as an agent in a fieldwork process. The term rereflecting, or rethinking, deals with thinking in a purely internal or Cartesian framework. (For a full discussion of these issues of intercultural translation, see Seremetakis 2016, 2017.)

(9) Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778): The most influential Genevan political philosopher, writer, and composer of the 18th century. Most known for his books *Discourse on Inequality* and *The Social Contract*, which are considered cornerstones in modern political and social thought.

(10) The relevance of this to Greece, for instance, occurs in the case of the Neohellenic paradigm that was tied to the biological concept of racial purity; it functioned as a single standard for all of Greece, ignoring plurality.

(11) Again, it is worth noting how this key anthropological concept and term, *ethnocentrism,* has been transferred in other languages and

cultures. In Greek, for example, the corresponding term *ethnokentrismos* has acquired a positive meaning, namely, attention to ethnos. The exploration of these differences is not a mere comparative curiosity. These concepts and their differential meanings may reveal regional epistemologies, thus, rendering them crucial for opening a self-reflexive, cross-cultural dialogue.

(12) The process of **decentering** emphasized the disjuncture between self and other, or Europe and other geographical areas, but also between nature and culture, or nature and society. As we discussed, society was considered to be part of the natural order. The intensified contact with other societies demonstrated that social forms were not fixed and predetermined; therefore, the multiplicity of social forms was possible. If nature was universal and created by God, society was artificial and constructed by men. At this juncture, Rousseau and others proposed that human society is founded on a nature/culture opposition: the given ecological constraints are acted upon by humanity and transformed and/or destroyed to produce social institutions. Consider, for example, the clearing of forests to create farm land: a hunting/gathering society needs the forest that guarantees the existence of the animals it exploits. People of an agrarian society must almost eradicate forests to plant crops. Animals and plants that were initially wild come under their domestication. But even on the level of hunting/gathering societies, the hunter who picks up a rock and uses another rock to carve it into an arrowhead transforms it from an object of nature into an object of culture. This demonstrates the culture/nature opposition. Finally, the organic capacity to use the vocal chords to make noise and even to pattern noise into meaningful sound is inherent in all human species. But the particular arbitrary set of sound patterns that develop into a language is a cultural construct. There is no inherent law or rationale that explains why one set of sound designates a particular object and not another set of sounds. The set is arbitrary.

(13) See G. Stocking (1968). George W. Stocking Jr. (1928-2013): German-born American anthropologist, known for his scholarship on the history of anthropology. Professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago.

(14) Marx had performed a similar critique to the evolutionists. He saw the process of the adoption of new cultural and technological elements not as a passive one, but as a process that was predetermined by already dominant structures and relations in society. What distinguishes Marx

from Boas is that the former placed an emphasis on the role of economic factors in this process.

(15) Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955): English social anthropologist. Professor at Oxford University and, previously, at the University of Chicago.

(16) Margaret Mead (1901-1978): American cultural anthropologist, known for her works in child-rearing, personality, and culture, following the example of her teacher Ruth Benedict. Professor at Rhode Island University and, previously, at Fordham University.

Ruth Benedict (1887-1948): American cultural anthropologist, known as the founder of the "culture and personality school." Professor at Columbia University.

Gregory Bateson (1904-1980): English anthropologist, known for his work on ecological anthropology. Professor at the University of California-Santa Cruz.

(17) See Marvin Harris, 1968. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. New York: Crowell.

Maurice Godelier, 1972. *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics*. New York: Monthly Review.

Marvin Harris (1927-2001): American anthropologist and author of more than seventeen books. Professor at the University of Florida.

Maurice Godelier: French economic anthropologist. Initiated the first program on economic anthropology at the Collège de France and, later, at the Center for Research and Documentation on Oceania, which he directed. President of the Société des Océanistes.

(18) See Oxford University website: https://www.isca.ox.ac.uk/prospective-students/degrees/social-anthropology/, accessed 9-30-2016.

(19) Jay Ruby: American scholar, cultural anthropologist, and archaeologist with excavations in the American Southwest, West Mexico, and the Republic of Sudan.

(20) Kinetography Laban.

Rudolf van Laban: Hungarian dancer and theorist. Pioneer of modern dance in Europe. Considered to be one of the most important figures in dance history.

(21) See Franz Boas' essay "Dance and Music in the Life of the Northwest Coast Indians of North America," p.10. In *The Function of Dance in Human Society,* Franziska Boas, ed. Dance Horizons, 1944.

(22) See Thomas Gossett, *Race the History of An Idea in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963. For a discussion of the basic premises of "Public Anthropology," see Seremetakis 2017.

(23) The term *culture* was later introduced to and adopted as new by several other languages and vocabularies and is still used interchangeably with civilization. This tension is reflected also in the translation of the terms. In Greek, for instance, the adjective *cultural* must necessarily revert back to *civilizational*.

(24) Some theorists mistake *culture* with *ideology*. A society or culture contains several different, competing, and even antagonistic ideologies. *Ideology* is defined as an organized system of ideas that reflect and perpetuate the political and economic interest of particular groups, sectors, or institutions in society (i.e., men/women). Ideologies draw on, manipulate, abstract, and reinterpret the system of shared meanings that form a culture and can intervene to transform a cultural system.

(25) Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933): Egyptian born poet. The most original and influential Greek poet of the 20th century.

(26) Cavafy's poem was translated by the author of this book. For Cavafy's poems in Greek, see *Cavafy Poems (1897-1918),* volume A', p. 110. Athens: Ikaros, 2016.

(27) Michel Foucault (1926-1984): Renowned French philosopher, historian of ideas, social theorist, and literary critic. Professor at the Collège de France.

(28) Immanuel Wallerstein: American sociologist, known for his world-system theory. Professor at Columbia University and head of the *Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems and Civilization* at Binghamton University (New York).

PART II:

WRITING THE OTHER

CHAPTER TWO

SCIENCE/LITERATURE

In the first half of the 20th century, the Boasian concept of fieldwork emphasized long-term intensive fieldwork with the aim of creating an exhaustive portrait of society as a holistic entity. The Boasian ethnographer understood the societies he or she was studying to be a holistic set of relations between ecology, economy, kinship, language, mythology, ritual, personality, and sexuality. The "native" was thought to experience society as an interrelated totality, and society itself to function as an interrelated totality of parts to the whole—the whole transcending the sum of its parts. The image of the whole could be seen in each of these sections. The ethnographer, therefore, as the single observer, operated under the assumption that the society and its people under study were susceptible to a holistic description.

The Boasian school, as it developed during and after Boas, in its effort to transform anthropology into a specialized scientific discipline with an object of knowledge that would demarcate it from other sciences, followed the rest of the humanities in drawing clear-cut lines between science and literature. The realist fieldworker or ethnographer was supposed to create holistic descriptions of society and its people, while denying any connection between science and fiction, or ethnography and novels. The early use of technology in the field was supposed to service the presencing of reality. The eye of the camera was substituted for the eye of the ethnographer as an omnipresent observer, allowing us, the readers, to place our gaze in the ethnographer's position. Such unmediated transparencies point to the one-to-one relation between sign and thing in modernity; words and things come together in a simultaneous act of seeing and naming in order to articulate the object. (This is a method also deployed in and by modern media today).

Yet, despite the intention of this style of writing to insure objectivity in contradistinction to literature, it is highly reminiscent of the 19th century model of novels. Novelists, like Melville, Dickens, Balzac, Flaubert, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky, or cubist painters, like Picasso, stood outside of

the action occurring and outside of time in order to describe and depict all the different temporalities taking place. Ethnographic realism drew on this tradition. In this style of writing, the novelist functioned as an omnipresent observer with no particular position and floated above the action, observing it from all angles and perspectives, having access to the inner thoughts of his/her characters, and manipulating their relations accordingly.

■

This strict dichotomy between science and literature in Boasian anthropology was criticized later by contemporary anthropologists, with James Clifford, Clifford Geertz, and Renato Rosaldo leading the way and many others followed by.

In his influential article entitled "On Ethnographic Authority," anthropologist James Clifford (1) claimed that, in anthropology, as well as in history, sociology, psychology, and political science, the clear-cut lines between science and literature no longer exist. The forms of representation determine what is represented and how we understand what is represented. Clifford pointed out that, in the 19th century, a university-trained or amateur ethnographer was not seen as a better interpreter of native life than the traveler tourist, the missionary, or the colonial administrator. In fact, most ethnographers before Boas were armchair theorists who extracted data from the writings of missionaries and colonial administrators. It was assumed that their job functions did not influence the data they collected or that the distant scientific observers who wrote their descriptions could see through the prejudice of the missionary by using the comparative method (e.g., the wedding rituals of one society were compared to another's). Boas and, later, Malinowski argued for a division of labor. To set aside the functions of anthropologists from other Europeans in Third World countries at the time, they stressed intensive fieldwork and systematic rules of observation. This method is known as **participant observation** (discussed in Chapter 3).

The term participant observation reflects the dual character of the ethnographer in the field. The ethnographer had to be incorporated in a society—a process that resembled the initiation ceremonies of tribal cultures—and to gain competency in the language in order to dialogue with informants. At the same time, the scientific training of the ethnographer would guarantee the necessary distance from his/her own

participation in order to transform it into scientific discourse. Participation that was too intensive in the society was distrusted.

James Clifford's critical essay on ethnographic authority was one of the first attempts to demonstrate that anthropology, as conducted at the time, could not be equated with an exact science, such as physics or chemistry, in which the scientist functions as an observer standing outside of his experiment. **In anthropology, the so-called observer is part of the investigation.** One's objective reactions and his physical presence affect the outcome and the characteristics of what one observes. This model was the final break with any subordination of anthropology and the study of culture to the natural sciences.

■

Clifford's essay pertains to the means by which early anthropologists (and, later, the social anthropologists of the British school), in an attempt to equate themselves with scientists who study the natural world, eliminated the effects of their investigative process. Yet, the fact that the anthropologist as an observer can distort or change a cultural situation is not necessarily negative, for the model of cultural contact of the anthropologist and that which he/she studies is a metaphor for the relation between societies.

Societies such as the US and Russia, for example, have organized their interactions with each other in terms of how each society represents the other to its own members. Representation of the Other, as Rousseau pointed out, is directly connected to the representation of ourselves, of how we conceive of our identity. Cavafy would certainly agree.

Anthropology, therefore, is a way of studying ourselves as we interact with the Other—this is the meaning of self-reflexivity. The practice of fieldwork in another culture, or our own culture, and the practice of writing about our fieldwork are culturally determined. Clifford demonstrated this by the following two pictures that represent the ethnographer in the process of fieldwork.

One picture is an 18th century drawing, and the other is a 20th century photograph. In the 18th century drawing, the ethnographer, a Catholic priest, is depicted as one figure in a crowd of Indians. He is surrounded by all the emblems of his own culture, i.e., Adam and Eve, the serpent in the Garden of Eden, the Hebrew language from the Old Testament, artifacts from the civilizations of Greece and Egypt, and artifacts from American

Indians. The message is clear: The Bible, with the story of the Garden of Eden, is the text that helps the ethnographer to locate and position the American Indians in relation to his own culture.

An evolutionary historical sequence (product of our culture) is also depicted as we move from the Garden of Eden to the images of the Indians and their tools to the artifacts of Egypt and Greece, and terminate with the image of European Christianity in the person of the priest–scientist. Clifford sees this first drawing to be depicting the chaos and multiplicity that characterizes cross-cultural contact. The ethnographer is a figure in the crowd and is surrounded by the baggage of his own culture.

In the second picture, Malinowski, a modern-day anthropologist, is about to engage in an exchange with Trobriand islanders. It is immediately obvious that the ensemble of people has been posing for the camera; the event is far from a spontaneous one caught in a candid shot. In this photo that is staged, the ethnographer is the author of the scene, "composing a fragment of Trobriand reality" (Clifford 1988, p. 118). In other words, the ethnographer as an observer shares the same observational viewpoint as you, "the reader," have now. For Clifford, this means that the function of ethnography had been to reconstruct a scene experienced by the ethnographer so that the reader could experience it in the same way: You are there because I was there. In this second photo, the ethnographer, as a representative of our own culture, is the sole interpreter of reality. He controls who is represented and interpreted and how this is achieved. For Clifford, both the content and form of this representation of ethnographic others are messages of our own culture and our relation to these others. In other words, he considers this authority of the ethnographer as the authority of Western civilization over Third World cultures—a colonial relationship, characteristic of the 19th to mid-20th century.

With the emergence of decolonization, Third World nationalisms, and the expansion of communicative networks, this relation of interpretive authority depicted in the picture of Malinowski is in the process of being broken up and fragmented. The European interpreter of other cultures is now exposed to the counter-interpretations of those societies. For Clifford, in this ambiguous, multi-vocal world, old forms of ethnographic representation, of writing ethnographies or working in the field, are no longer applicable. New forms must emerge.

In this assertion, he discloses the fundamental principles of anthropology as defined by Boas and Rousseau:

- The transformation of cultures under study reflects and/or interacts with the transformations occurring within the society that produces anthropologists.
- The shifting relations between societies and cultures determine the transformation of the methods and concepts of anthropology.

Anthropology is a contingent discipline, whose stability and instability are in direct correlation to historical change. Anthropology challenges the idea of absolute knowledge and advocates cultural relativism. It is in culturally relative and shifting contexts that the anthropologist conducts and writes his/her research.

■

To summarize and conclude, Clifford's critique of traditional ethnography focused on the concept of the ethnographer as an omnipresent observer, detached and uninvolved, like a scientist who conducts an experiment. This concept implied that there is a totally internal culture out there that can be captured. Clifford, therefore, argued that the post-Boasians did not understand and exploit the full implications of their diffusion model. Culture is not internal; it is a way of describing the relation between societies. The ethnographer perceives his/her own culture as absolute, as natural, until he/she encounters another culture. Culture becomes visible in this cross-cultural encounter—the entry of a foreign element into that culture, the anthropologist. It follows that the anthropologist is part of the diffusion process, and culture is that which includes the presence and intervention of the ethnographer.

Culture is also its representation. This thesis stands in contrast to the treatment and understanding of systems of representation and semantic categories as being expressive and/or symptomatic, which implies that cultural actors could only, if at all, register historical experience in decentered, unconscious, and idiosyncratic formats. This thesis is also discussed by Geertz and Rosaldo in the following chapters.

Readings

- James Clifford. “On Ethnographic Authority,” pp. 21-54. In *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Note

(1) James Clifford: Contemporary American cultural anthropologist and historian. Professor in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California (Santa Cruz).

CHAPTER THREE

ON THE "NATIVE'S" INTERPRETATION

Another critic of scientistic anthropology, the renowned anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1) (1983), discussed **participant observation** as a metaphor of what the anthropologist does and writes about. He divided it into two terms:

Participant, which represents the inside, "experience near" and observation, which stands for the outside, "experience far" or "experience distant." Experience-near concepts refer to those elements that people use to describe their own world, their immediate subjective experience. People need to work with this type of knowledge to get through their everyday life. The anthropologist must master these concepts to enter a fieldwork process.

Experience-distant concepts involve the transformation of experience-near concepts into a body of scientific knowledge capable of being compared to analogous concepts in other societies. They basically divide into the cultural categories of the native, which the anthropologist attempts to share, and those of the anthropologist, which are unrelated to the native.

What emerges from Geertz's model is that an elementary formation, like the concept of culture and the subsequent description of a culture, is not inherently present in any particular society. The concept of culture appears and becomes a reality only in the context of cross-cultural contact. Culture does not exist within a society; but it organizes the relations between societies.

Geertz talked about the spontaneity with which people deploy experience-near concepts. For example, consider the way food, such as meat and vegetables, is arranged, classified, and organized spatially in a supermarket. Another example is the order in which food is served during a meal. These examples correspond to Boas' notion of culture as an unconscious determinant of human behavior.

Social geographers also have an experience-distant concept called "front" and "back" spaces. We do not usually think of our spatial arrangements this way, but we do act accordingly. Front space is, for example, the living room; it is where all the formal, publicly oriented social and image-constructing events and activities usually take place. Back space (e.g., the bathroom) is where events take place that may contradict or invert the impressions constructed by front-space behavior. Statistically, most suicides, as private acts, occur in the bathroom. (Space is further discussed in Chapter 15).

Geertz shifted the dynamics of representation. As discussed earlier, one focus of anthropology is how the fieldworker represents the Other to himself and in turn himself in the process of studying the Other. Geertz moved this whole dynamic of representation and counter-representation into the society itself, away from cross-cultural contacts, to focus on how members of one society represent each other to themselves. This assumes a shared language and systems of representation, based on which people, every day in their society, function as interpreters of each other's speech, gestures, and actions. The anthropologist in this crowd is one interpreter among others, an interpreter who is also subject to counter-interpretation. In short, the anthropologist is not the omnipresent observer; he/she is hereby moved back into the crowd, one cultural artifact among others—as in the 18th century drawing in Clifford's article—and the position he/she occupies limits and informs what the anthropologist knows.

Geertz's focus on the person points once again to the way by which anthropologists extract knowledge in and from the field. They may want to talk about institutions, religions, or rituals, but they are forced to first confront and deal with persons. In turn, the anthropologist can understand how he/she is received and understood as a person by the Other.

In conclusion: What was Geertz's contribution with this thesis? Geertz expanded the basic methodological category of anthropology, namely **interpretation**. Interpretation, which previously meant a relation between an anthropologist and an informant, now governed the relation between natives.

He offered, as an example, the concept of selfhood in Java (**Indonesia**) (2). Selfhood was organized by the notion of "inside" and "outside." A question arises: To what extent does the Javanese notion of inside and outside coincide or differ from the anthropologist's notion of experience-near (**emic**) and experience-distant (**etic**)? Furthermore, what happens to

the anthropologist who finds the categories he/she uses to gain a distant, objective, scientific knowledge of a society being used by that society as part of its own self-definition?

In this context, the scientific method is revealed as nothing but the cultural construct of the anthropologist, part of his self-definition, equal to, and no more privileged than, the self-defining concepts of the society under study. Anthropology, in this situation, becomes a process of translation, mediation, and negotiation (between the concepts of the anthropologist and those of the informant).

Readings

- Clifford Geertz. “From the Native’s Point of View,” pp. 55-72. In *Local Knowledge.* New York: Basic Books, 1983.

Notes

(1) Clifford Geertz (1926-2006): Influential American cultural anthropologist. Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University (New Jersey).

(2) Java is one of the 18.000 islands of Indonesia. The Republic of Indonesia, formerly the Netherlands East Indies, comprises a good part of the archipelago extending from the mainland of South-East Asia to New Guinea. The population of Indonesia is approximately 260,000,000 and includes more than 350 different groups, each one with its own identity, history, and language. About half of the population is Javanese.

■

CHAPTER FOUR

REPRESENTATION REFINED

Geertz's notion of representation, as discussed in the previous chapter, was later refined by Renato Rosaldo. Rosaldo studied the Ilongot in the **Philippines.** The Ilongot numbered about 3500, lived in an upland area northeast of Manila, and have been known for being compelled by rage to headhunt when in bereavement. Rosaldo's well-known study *Ilongot Hunting as Story and Experience* (1986) is as much about the dynamics of the fieldwork process as it is about the Philippine headhunting society he worked with.

He focused on the Ilongot storytelling and the efficacy and impact that their stories had on their acting and the formation of their everyday experience. Informants **tell stories** to the anthropologist. This determines how the anthropologist may act and interpret his/her everyday experience in the field. In turn, the anthropologist tells stories in the writing of ethnographies that may interact with the common-sense notions and everyday experiences of the reader of these texts.

Moving from Boas to Geertz to Rosaldo, each one belonging to a different generation of anthropology, we see the search for a common ground that includes the anthropologist and the informant (rather than excluding the informant) in terms of shared experiences and cognitive capacities. Boas focused on the common characteristics of the processes of abstraction, language, and folklore in his own society and in American Indian societies. Geertz centered on the process of how people represent themselves to each other through stylized and systematic techniques and genres (forms of representation). Rosaldo refined Geertz's notion of representation. He was concerned with how people, when telling stories, construct their identity and that of others and, in turn, how the practice of storytelling and the memory of stories constitute society.

■

One of Rosaldo's goals was to rescue the everyday Ilongot experience from what is known in anthropology as **functionalist interpretation**. In our society, a person who gets up in the morning to go to work does so to earn a living. This is a purely functional act of survival. Therefore, hunting in the jungle of the Philippines for food may appear, on the surface, to be an analogous act of functional survival. In fact, this functional aspect was overstressed by many anthropologists who worked with tribes that lived in and depended on difficult ecological environments for food, housing, clothing, tools, and medicine. Indeed, in the first half of the 20th century, the economic dimension of tribal social life and the way in which labor tasks were organized (between men and women, old and young, adults and children through kinship relations) were interpreted as functional mechanisms, mechanical apparatuses that facilitated collective survival. Yet, in small-scale societies, there was no strict separation between art and reality or everyday experience (2). This is in contrast to our society, where there is a strict separation between work and play, task and pleasure, the aesthetic and nonaesthetic, and art and reality. Considering this, Rosaldo set out to discuss hunting not in terms of getting something to eat, but in terms of how hunting created local histories, how its representation organized time, how storytellers extracted personal identities, and how hunting stories impregnated everyday experience with symbolic significance in the Ilongot culture.

He began his analysis by examining and critiquing the functionalist perspective through the framework of ethnoscience. **Ethnoscience** is the study of how a culture organizes its knowledge of plants and animals or the natural world in general. It is the type of functional classification halfway between practical knowledge and systematic science that facilitates survival in a difficult and diverse ecology. Rosaldo found this approach of studying another culture inadequate in terms of capturing the experience of Ilongot hunting.

Concretely, ethnoscience would classify the different types of hunting that people engage in and the different types of linguistic terms that they use to classify hunting activities, i.e., to distinguish between an individual and a collective hunt, a hunt that occurs in the day from one that occurs at night, a hunt that focuses on a wild pig or another animal, and a hunt that uses dogs or does not use dogs. All these different categories, however, in the Ilongot language, fall under the overarching category of "seeking for"or "looking for." Rosaldo, therefore, was not content with this method of analysis, because it involved what he termed "disambiguation." In short, people may have clear-cut categories and distinctions on the level of

language—particularly, when an anthropologist asks them to make a distinction between day hunting and night hunting—but what appears orderly and distinct on the level of classifying language may be more ambiguous and disorderly in actual practice.

Furthermore, ethnoscience assumes there is a direct, one-to-one relation between words, names, and signs and the things and experiences spoken of, named, and signified by all the above. Yet, there is a disjuncture between representation and experience in Ilongot hunting, and this is the source of its creative transformation from a purely functional to a symbolic act, or what we can term a **performance.** Here again, it is obvious that the problematics and concepts that form the internal experience of a society also come into play in terms of how the anthropologist understands his own process of gaining knowledge about that society. In this context, the various relations among words, things, and actions are particularly important.

In addition to ethnoscience, Rosaldo discussed and criticized the realist approach to the study of Ilongot hunting, which we already encountered in the discussion of Malinowski's photograph by James Clifford. The realist approach derived from 19th century novels and historiography, in which the anthropologist functioned like a camera or a video machine and attempted to transcribe exactly what happened in terms of material action as he/she saw it. Rosaldo pointed out that this technique is not culturally neutral, either. If ethnoscience tends to impose our scientific categories and modes of logic on another culture, the realist approach imposes our concept of reality in terms of the causal relations between actions and events, character conflict and opposition (all central categories of 19th century novels, which are meant to give us internal insight into the psychology of the protagonist of the novel). (3) In short, Rosaldo's discomfort with this approach is that the anthropologist functions in a manner analogous to the realist novelist or cubist painter who stands outside of the action. Like Clifford and Geertz, he believes that this position is fictional.

It can be added here that the visual orientation of this approach and its analogy to the workings of a camera reveal its cultural prejudices. A question arises: How do we know it was the visual dimension or action-oriented dimension of the hunt that was important for the Ilongot hunters? It could be the acoustic dimension, or it might be that of smell. We also know, in terms of the visual dimension, that the classification of colors and the number of colors recognized vary greatly from culture to culture.

Rosaldo went on to identify this realist position not only as fiction, but also as the effect of techniques of writing associated with fiction. For this purpose, he offered an example of a hunt as described by a 19th century realist novelist. He contrasted the verbatim (word for word) transcriptions of dialogue, maintaining a focus on minute details—all of which give the reader a sense of being there at the moment the hunt is being enacted—with the total absence of the author. The invisible author functioned like an unseen observer, inhabiting the interior of every act and moment by being outside of all acts. This is the concept of the author as God.

Today anthropologists are troubled about deploying this method to describe societies they live in, insofar as the writing style that establishes the author as an unseen observer replicates a colonial relationship with indigenous people and, thus, renders anthropology an extension of the domination of the Third World by Europe and America. Rosaldo's point is that **before we can narrate or tell stories about other cultures, about other ways of life, we must learn how the participants of these cultures narrate their own life.**

For example, the first thing one finds out about Ilongot storytelling is that **space** was more important than **time.** Put differently, where actions take place was more important than when they take place. The storyteller used place names, his personal map of the jungle, to establish the parts (coordinates) of the story. By naming the places, he recalled what had happened and what would happen there. Each place was linked to a particular activity or event. Time was measured through the sequences of leaving one place to go to another. For example, when the Ilongot stated that they would hunt for three weeks, they did not say that within this three-week period they would move from A to B to C to D. They first said that they would do different activities at places A, B, C, and D, and added that doing all these things at these locales would take three weeks. In short, time was a function and result of moving in space.

A series of place names can, itself, be called a story. The use of place names to tell a story is very significant. In the realist novel, every detail had to be described in order to convey a sense of what is happening. In the Ilongot narrative, a single place name condensed a web of multiple experiences, sensory memories, and associations that filled out the details of the hunt in both the storyteller's and listener's imagination, and these details did not have to be named in and of themselves.

Storytelling in Ilongot society assumed the competence of the listeners who had shared the same experiences and places that the storyteller telegraphically communicated through the shorthand of the place name. This area of shared competence that the act of storytelling assumed, pointed to, and disclosed would give the ethnographer access to the cultural system. The accumulated experiences and techniques were triggered and symbolized by the place names. Thus, the place names functioned like historical archives; they were depositories of cultural knowledge in which knowledge was stored in a coded form, much in the same way that a computer stores knowledge through codes in our society.

Rosaldo also showed the extent to which storytelling involves social relations in its actual performance. He described the co-narration of a story, as two or more Ilongots constructed a single narrative by dialogue. This again is a process that does not only occur between natives, but also between the anthropologist and the informant. Thus, a way of doing anthropology in the Ilongot culture is by learning how to tell, listen, co-narrate, and construct stories, for, in the same way as the Ilongot story, the construction of ethnography is contingent on the collaboration and co-narration that emerges from the social relation of an anthropologist and those he/she studies (another example of self-reflexivity).

In conclusion, if we look closer at Rosaldo's study, we realize that, as he moved from the functionalist perspective to the classification perspective of ethnoscience, then to the realist description, and finally, to an analysis of how stories are performed and then told in order to construct Ilongot concepts of space, time, and action, he repeated, in fact, the process of his own fieldwork. In other words, he repeated the stages that the anthropologist goes through to pass from experience-distant to experience-near concepts (as discussed by Geertz).

Rosaldo concluded his study by asserting that the Ilongot, through their storytelling traditions, experienced themselves as characters in their stories while they engaged in the actual process of hunting. The focus of Ilongot storytelling set up a standard of how hunting should be experienced, what has value in it, and what the role of the Ilongot is in the hunt, in relation to the hunted animals. For instance, in one story, the relation of human hunters and hunted animals was reversed, and people experienced themselves in the position of the animals hunted.

This way, Rosaldo demonstrated that the narration of hunting influenced the actual experience of hunting to the same extent that the act of hunting

informed its representation in stories. When the Ilongot hunted, they performed an imitation of their narrative about hunting. As characters acting out a part in a story that was unfolding in the immediate present, the Ilongot transformed the functional practice of getting something to eat into a symbolic experience—an experience that related that action to a cosmological order involving place names, time, and the relation between men and animals. (Rosaldo is also discussed in Chapter 23.)

■

Readings

- Renato Rosaldo. “Ilongot Hunting as Story and Experience,” pp. 97-138. In *The Anthropology of Experience.* Edited by Victor Turner and Edward Bruner. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1986.

Notes

(1) Renato Rosaldo: Contemporary American cultural anthropologist. Professor at Stanford University and Director of the Center for Chicano Research.

(2) Consider here the controversy between violence on TV and actual violence in the streets in our society. This is also an issue of how storytelling structures a reality and impacts our everyday life. Thus, in anthropology, precisely because of its long experience of small-scale societies, there is no strict separation between art and reality or everyday experience; they interpenetrate.

(3) See, for instance, novelists such as Dickens, Melville, Balzac, Flaubert, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky.

A Note on Ethnopoetics

In the 1980s, we witnessed a critique of the trend to treat research subjects simply as objects of research, which resulted in the recognition that ethnographic knowledge is produced from dialogue between the ethnographer and research subjects. This gave rise to ethnography as a literary genre.

Ethnographers, in an attempt to capture the dynamics of participant observation and the collective process of knowledge production, and to replicate their holistic experience in another culture, began to deploy, in their own texts, a variety of literary genres. These include interviews, descriptive prose, verbal and visual images, polyphonic and polysemic symbols and images, and ethnopoetics. The choice of these genres is determined by the aims of the fieldworker, as well as by the field situation.

The term ethnopoetics was coined by Jerome Rothenberg (1) in the 1960s. The development of ethnopoetics as a separate subfield of study was pioneered in the mid-20th century by Dennis Tedlock (2), Stanley Diamond (3), Dell Hymes (4), and Gary Snyder (5).

Ethnopoetics is the study of indigenous cultures other than those of western literary tradition. It recognizes that different societies produce literature and verbal art in idioms and media not found in the western written literary canon. This literature is frequently oral, embedded in ritual performance, improvised, and collectively produced, and it functions as the cultural memory of the group. The literary trend in ethnographic description recognizes that writing is a culturally specific form for codifying knowledge and experience, and that writing forms can affect what can be claimed as knowledge and as truth.

The literary tendency also recognizes that the origins of ethnographic description lie in travelers' diaries, missionary journals, and cartographic descriptions by geographers, going back as far as the 17th century.

Ethnology, geography, and travel accounts have a common literary origin in European culture. In Greek society, ethnological descriptions based on traveler accounts and cartography originated with the historian Herodotus (as he described different cultures and societies) and were expanded upon by Pindar, Byron, and the German Hellenists, among others. The literary trend in ethnography, therefore, recognizes that the

history of scientific description is intertwined with the history of literature.

There are several important ethnopoetic studies in anthropology [see, for instance, Keith Bassos' *Wisdom Sits in Places* (University of New Mexico Press, *1996)]*. More particularly, in the context of modern Greece, C. Nadia Seremetakis' ethnography *The Last Word* (1991) is an analysis of ethnopoetics as a form of knowledge production (legal and historical) that pioneered the self-reflexive application of ethnopoetic aesthetics in its writing style (for further discussion, see also Seremetakis 2017).

■

Readings

- Stanley Diamond. *Poets/Anthropologists, Anthropologists/Poets.* Special issue of *Dialectical Anthropology,* vol. 11, no. 24, 1986.

- Dell Hymes. *"In vain I tried to tell you": Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania 1981.

- Dell Hymes. "Ethnopoetics," pp. 67-69. In *Theory Culture Society*, no. 23, 2006.

- Jerome Rothenberg. *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania.* California: University of California 1985 (orig. 1968).

- C. Nadia Seremetakis. "Antiphonies, Or on 'Native' Ethnography in Modernity." In *Sensing the Everyday.* Forthcoming 2017.

- Denis Tedlock. *The Spoken World and the Work of Interpretation*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1983.

Notes

(1) Jerome Rothenberg: American poet and translator, noted for his work in ethnopoetics and performance poetry. Professor of visual arts and literature at the University of California (San Diego) and, previously, at State University of New York (Binghamton).

(2) Denis Tedlock (1939-2016): American cultural anthropologist. Professor of English and research professor of anthropology at State University of New York (Buffalo).

(3) Stanley Diamond (1922-1991): American poet and anthropologist. Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at The New School for Social Research (New York).

(4) Dell Hymes (1927-2009): Influential American sociolinguist, anthropologist, and folklorist. Professor and Dean of the Graduate School of Education at Pennsylvania University and, previously Professor at the University of California (Berkeley) and Harvard University.

(5) Gary Snyder: American poet, Pulitzer Prize winner. Faculty at the University of California (Davis).

CHAPTER FIVE

NATURAL, NATURALISM, AND COMMON SENSE

The interfacing of western genres of storytelling, such as the 19th century novelistic realism, with Ilongot styles of storytelling by Rosaldo, made the relation between oral narrative and Ilongot culture visible. Western modes of storytelling, scientific or literary, were revealed in this confrontation as cultural constructs and not as neutral, objective descriptions of reality. The reality of the ethnographer in the field is negotiated through this clash of cross-cultural forms.

The dynamics of this notion of culture as a mediated, negotiated reality between two systems of meaning is evident when we examine the "ideology of the natural" in western society [as Fredric Jameson (1) would also agree]. **Ideology of the natural** refers to the natural as the authoritative model for organizing social experience. It addresses the taken-for-granted, unquestioned, unexamined dimensions of our experience. This is distinguished from nature as an ecological–biological dimension. The latter was discussed earlier, in the context of medieval society, which understood itself as totally integrated with nature insofar as both the domain of men and the domain of nature were considered components of a divine schema or plan.

Throughout western history, the image and value of natural has been used to fix and rigidify social reality, to inhibit the perception and emergence of possible alternative forms from social existence. But the natural does not come into being in a natural way. We all inherit and then construct and reproduce the natural character of our everyday existence by assuming that it is fixed and unchangeable and acting accordingly, and by excluding those experiences and people that offer an alternative reality.

Anthropology comes into existence in its modern form due to the estrangement of the natural. In other words, anthropology, through techniques of observation and analysis in the context of cross-cultural contact, renders both our own society and the society under investigation

as unfamiliar. The anthropologist cannot take any social formation for granted, and insofar as he/she reflects on the unexamined dimensions of other societies, he/she reflects also on the unquestioned dimensions of his/her own culture. Thus, the anthropologist is not interested in the passive relations between social actors and their society, as the ideology of the natural implies, but in the ways social agents actively construct their relations and positions in a social order.

■

Clifford Geertz, in his article "Common Sense as a Cultural System," examined the most natural and unquestioned of all social constructs, namely, **common sense**.

He asserted that there is no universal common sense. What is commonsensical and natural in one society may not be in another. But **to understand "the way of life" in another society, the anthropologist must examine that society's system of common sense, of how people experience time, space, the body, the material world, causality, and/or the relation between acts and consequences.** Here, anthropologists must suspend their belief in the system of common sense in their own society to avoid seeing and understanding another society's common sense as an aberration or a form of insanity. To understand one system of common sense from within, we must relate to our own system from without.

Geertz was critical of anthropologists who, when studying other cultures, end up looking for the dominant cultural forms of their own society. For example, they focus on religion, cosmology, art, law, or technology, which may be dominant cultural forms in our society, assuming they are equally dominant in the society or social group under study.

Geertz's analysis of common sense is an extension of the definition of the Boasian shift of the definition of culture from the 19th century idea of cultivation, manners, and high art to the understanding of culture as constructing the experience of everyday life. It was certainly a move away from positivist anthropology and closer to what came to be generally termed *empathetic or naturalist* anthropology.

Common sense in the English language is defined as "the immediate deliverance of experience," "in the grain of nature realities," "life in a nut shell," "authority," "matter-of-fact apprehensions of reality," "the sheer actuality of experience," and "unspoken premise," or is referred to through

proverbs, such as “early to bed, early to rise, keeps a man healthy and wise.” Common sense is also transformed into stories and commentaries and is actively transmitted, historically constructed, questioned, disputed, formalized, and dramatized.

Systems of common sense reveal how we categorize the world and nature, and how these categorizations affect our social relations and even our concepts of what is human. Therefore, in some cultures, there can only be two genders, distinct and diametrically opposed. This belief has enormous influence on social behavior and sexuality, the definition of the normal/abnormal, and the concept of nature and human biology. However, the anthropological record has shown that there were societies (for example, the Navaho Indians) that had an intersexual category of person, which is neither male nor female. Marilyn Strathern also documented this in Melanesia (see *The Gender of the Gift*, discussed in Chapter 21).

Intersexuality, therefore, must be seen as both a biological and cultural phenomenon. In our society, instead, the hermaphrodite has had to play the role of one gender or the other, because of our dualistic categorization of sexuality. This role-playing is a cultural imposition and a biological reality. In the Navaho society that Geertz studied, the intersexual did not have to render one component of gender identity dominant over another.

In conclusion, Geertz implied that, in our society, the choosing of one gender role over the other is forced upon the intersexual so that our own categories of the natural and the normal are not visibly transgressed. Biological reality is denied in favor of the reality implied in our own concepts of the natural.

■

Readings

- Clifford Geertz. “Common Sense as a Cultural System,” pp. 73-93. In *Local Knowledge.* New York: Basic Books, 1983.

Note

(1) Fredric Jameson: American literary critic and political theorist. Professor of Comparative Literature and Romance Studies and Director of the Center for Critical Theory at Duke University (North Carolina, USA).

PART III:

READING THE OTHER OR ON VISUAL COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER SIX

READING AND VIOLENCE

This section is a critical discussion of three ethnographic studies that deal with the reading of the cultural Other in the field. The first two studies, conducted and written by anthropologists of different generations, are critically (re)read by a younger anthropologist, the author of this book, and in conclusion, a third study is discussed as a different paradigm of visual communication. Thus, this section (re)presents an exercise in dialogical anthropology and a lesson on the dialogical reading of a text, be it an article, a book, or the human body.

■

The first study to be critically discussed in this section is **Claude Levi-Strauss**' classic essay "***A Writing Lesson***" (1973).

This essay is an account about cross-cultural contact, colonialism (the domination of one society by another), ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism. It highlights the different ways in which a single social reality can be experienced and understood by members of different cultures.

All these components make this story an allegory, insofar as it describes all the conditions that come into play during fieldwork, as well as the historical conditions that gave birth to anthropology in the first place (such as contact, domination, and colonialism).

Levi-Strauss opens the essay by describing the original purpose of his field trip and the conditions he encountered in the field. He was commissioned to conduct a census in Brazil. However, the Nambikwara, an Amazonian tribe that he wanted to contact, was nomadic. No one knew how many people comprised it, for they had no fixed settlements and migrated seasonally through the jungle. In our society, we have had trouble understanding a tribe that none ever sees as a totality, a tribe that is always semi-invisible because it never stays in one place all at once. Levi-Strauss,

therefore, was there to take a census of the population; in other words, he had to fix and stabilize this unknown, nomadic entity through mathematics and writing, by counting its people. This way, the tribe could acquire an identity within terms and categories understood by our own culture.

He presents the first piece of evidence of cross-cultural contact between Europeans and this tribe: the influenza epidemic, a disease introduced into the Amazon area by the Europeans, which had a devastating effect on the Indians because of their lack of prior immunity (that the Europeans possessed) and the absence of necessary medicine. The disease reduced the population and immobilized these nomads. Thus, the first Indians that Levi-Strauss counted for the census were the dead ones—the 300 that had died within 48 hours. This left the rest of the Indians in a state of "disintegration."

Curious, indeed, is the relation between writing and death. Levi-Strauss establishes a close connection between culture contact, violence, and the death of a culture, whether this is brought about by disease or by writing. The writing of a culture, as in the census, tends to coincide with the death of a culture as an entity.

From then on, his essay is organized around the opposition between writing and non-writing, which, in turn, is expressed in the opposition between societies with history and societies outside of history, societies of domination and oppression and societies without domination.

According to Levi-Strauss, the Nambikwara tribe does not write. Yet, at some point, he reveals to us that these people draw and writing is described as "making lines." Here begins a critical reading of his evidence and conclusions based on his underlying presuppositions:

Levi-Strauss attempts to identify a cultural difference. But in the process of doing so, he himself commits the first ethnocentrism. He claims the Indians do not write, obviously because they do not possess the European phonetic, linear writing. Could one then say the same for the Chinese, who also have writing that does not follow the European model?

Reading further, we are told that a neighboring tribe also drew lines. And in Levi-Strauss' own analysis, these drawings appear to show social organization, that is, their drawings exhibit the same dualistic structure as their kinship organization. Yet, for Levi-Strauss, societies without writing are also societies without history. But if history is a written record of

social experience and relations, then aren't the drawings he analyzed written records of social relations?

Further on in his essay, he describes a situation in which the tribe was angry with the chief for not providing enough food for the journey. The political authority of the chief is called into question by his people. In other words, the political authority in this tribe depended on the group's consent; the chief is not an absolute ruler. He attempted, therefore, to re-establish his authority first, by going out into the jungle with his wife to collect food for the tribe and second, by imitating writing. The reason for the latter is that Levi-Strauss came from the outside with power and wealth and brought gifts to the tribe. The chief, thus, attempted to restore his authority by linking it to Levi-Strauss' authority and did so through the theatrics of writing.

Yet, Levi-Strauss concludes that, although the chief did not understand the content of the writing, he replicated its social function, that is, as an instrument of domination. Here, Levi-Strauss committed the second ethnocentrism. He used the chief's mimicry, which, for him, condensed several hundred years of history, to embark on a meditation on the political functions of writing and civilization. But in doing so, he established an evolutionary model of history. The historical shift of societies without writing to societies with writing is interpreted by Levi-Strauss as a shift into a succession of societies characterized by increasing modes of domination in which writing is essential.

By using, however, the chief's performance as a metaphor, he reveals that writing was initially deployed as a form of secret knowledge, one that the chief shared with the white man, Levi-Strauss. Therefore, this form of secret knowledge was tied to the creation of political hierarchies. In making this analogy between the chief's performance and western history, the particular circumstances of the Amazonian tribe become absorbed by the general dynamics of western history. These Indians are now doomed to follow the same evolutionary pattern as the West. The increase of writing is leading to the increase of domination and hierarchy.

There are several contradictions in this thinking. Toward the end of his essay, Levi-Strauss describes a situation (see pp. 295-97) of potential violence, or what we in anthropology call **symbolic warfare**: two antagonistic tribes express, mediate, and resolve a potential conflict through a theatrical gesture of violence, without any real violence taking place. In other words, to establish a clear-cut political relation that is the

prelude to an economic exchange between tribes, the two groups mimic the violence that will occur if a political agreement does not take effect.

These theatrics, this mimicry, are identical to the theatrics of the chief who attempted to restore a political relation through the mimicry of writing. This is a prime example of Boasian diffusion: a cultural practice or form is adopted by another society but undergoes a mutation and is adjusted to local cultural systems, in this case, the theatrical presentation of political relations.

Levi-Strauss misreads these actions and claims that the chief is imitating him in order to identify with the political authority of the white man. The chief, on the contrary, had transplanted writing into a performance, an indigenous cultural strategy for restoring or establishing a political relation. This is also evident by the fact that, later, the chief lost his authority with his followers. Thus, writing does not automatically entail domination. The chief's performance was not an attempt to coerce his followers, but rather an attempt to win their consent—which did not work.

The other contradiction involves Levi-Strauss' depiction of writing within the confines of western history. Here again, his evolutionist assumptions do not hold. Initially, writing is an instrument of domination, because it is associated with secret knowledge, hierarchies, and elite groups that exploit their monopoly over this technique in order to achieve political domination. Yet, when he considers writing as an instrument of domination in 19th century Europe, its deployment no longer is related to being a secret technique or knowledge. Rather, he describes the democratization of writing and its diffusion as a collective knowledge by such institutions as schools or the army. This, too, for Levi-Strauss, documents that writing is used for political domination—compulsory education in schools, the military, and the state's struggle against illiteracy are all examples of the increase of central authority over individual citizens. But he does not explain how writing as a form of secret knowledge and political domination evolves into a form of public knowledge, while still retaining its mode of political domination.

In short, there is no evolutionary continuity involved here. Instead, what we are dealing with is two different types of societies, two different modes of domination, and two conceptualizations of the functions of writing.

In conclusion, writing itself is not the exclusive property of one culture in relation to another. Writing does not exhibit universal historical

characteristics, and, thus, it must be understood in a framework of historical and cultural relativism. Finally, the possession or non-possession of writing is not a clear-cut basis upon which to categorize one society in relation to another.

■

Readings

- Claude Levi-Strauss. “A Writing Lesson,” pp. 294-304. In *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). Translated in English by John and Doreen Weightman. New York: Atheneum, 1973.

Note

(1) Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009): Renowned French anthropologist-ethnologist. Professor at the Collège de France and member of the French Academy (Académie Française).

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EYE EATS

The second ethnographic study under critical reading is Loring Danforth's *Death Rituals in Rural Greece* (1982). Danforth (1) adopted Levi-Strauss' structuralist thinking in representing the Other. His visual ethnography is chosen to be (re)discussed here, for it represents the first effort in European ethnography to move *beyond text* by utilizing photography as a medium of representation of the other. It was also a first attempt at what is currently pursued in anthropology and beyond, namely, *collaborative studies*. The anthropologist Danforth collaborated with the photographer Alexander Tsiaras to document death rituals in Central Greece.

This ethnography coincided with James Clifford's essay on ethnographic authority. As it was discussed previously, Clifford focused on the practice of fieldwork, in either another culture or our own, and the practice of writing about our fieldwork as culturally determined processes. He chose to demonstrate this cultural construction by reading two pictures that represented the ethnographer in the fieldwork process. Thus, Clifford's study, just like Jean and John Comaroff's study, which will be discussed next, gives us a paradigm of how **some media depictions (re)contextualize, whereas others decontextualize**. Via interpretive analysis, the Comaroffs relocate the visual into social, political, and historical contexts, thus, critiquing pure visual representations in anthropology and beyond. These studies can be juxtaposed to Danforth's study, which, given Tsiaras' photography, represents a negative example, one in which the medium of photography is decontextualized and decontextualizing.

After the decisive critique of scientistically oriented ethnography, which occurred by Clifford and Marcus in 1986, anthropologists, in an effort to extend ethnography beyond text, began exploring the inclusion of visual technology in the field and, at the same time, developing a critique of visual realism. One of the first works that delineated crucial issues pertaining to both was Seremetakis' article "The Eye of the Other" in 1984, inspired by the Danforth–Tsiaras effort to read and write the other

with new eyes. Her critical analysis of the anthropologist's optic and the photographer's anti-anthropological, realist gaze in their collaborative documentation of death rituals in Central Greece represents the first critique of the then-developing subfield of Visual Anthropology in the context of European anthropology. A short version of this article follows here.

■

Structuralism, Universalism, and Peasant Particularities: On the Eye of the Other (2)

Beginning with the early and seminal works of Levi-Strauss, structuralist models in anthropology, with their emphasis on systemic elegance, have overlooked the interpersonal complexities of the fieldwork situation. The ambiguous relationship of structuralist thought to the fieldwork process has its co-origins in the formalist bias of the former, as well as in its unresolved status as either the normative methodology or "objective description" of reality. It is the confusion between these two poles of structuralist inquiry that also characterized the ethnography *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (1982) by Loring Danforth, with photography by Alexander Tsiaras.

The book was symptomatic of the imposition of the formalist symmetry of structuralist frameworks on the diffuse, contradictory, cross-cultural reality of fieldwork—as will be shown through an analysis of the methodologies upon which this study was based. Between 1975 and 1976, Tsiaras, a Greek American photographer, while visiting relatives in a Thessalian village, Potamia, documented a series of mortuary and exhumation ceremonies. Upon his return to the States, he was advised to show his portfolio to Danforth, who had previously conducted an anthropological study of the firewalkers of Aghia Eleni. Motivated by Tsiaras' photographs, Danforth traveled separately to Potamia and conducted a brief ethnographic study of local mortuary rituals. Danforth's ethnography and Tsiaras' photographs, separated by a three-year gap, as well as the anthropological perspective of the one and the anti-anthropological perspective of the other, formed the basis of this visual ethnography.

The study of death rituals, Danforth claimed, had been over-exoticized in

both anthropological and folkloric studies. The proper study of death as a cultural unit in one society should, instead, open into the analysis of death as a universal cultural theme. He hoped that the readers of this book would recognize their own death in the death experience of rural Greeks. It was his belief that the cultural opposition between self and the ethnographic other, which prevents this cross-cultural recognition, is based on a romanticized exoticism that is at odds with the aspirations of a humanistic anthropology. In this case, humanistic anthropology is identified with structuralism and its belief in the universal cognitive origins of diverse cultural codes.

For Danforth, this transcultural thematizing of death is best expressed as binary oppositions in which the dialectical relationship of death and life is parallel to the dialectical opposition of nature and culture. From the perspective of these universal binary oppositions, all death rituals can be seen as the core of a universal language or code. The performance of death-related rituals is an attempt to mediate the opposition between life and death by asserting that death is an integral part of life. Death, in fact, "provides an opportunity to affirm the continuity and meaning of life itself" (Danforth 1982, p. 6).

A structural homology lies hidden in the text between the binary oppositions of death/life, culture/nature, self/other, and anthropologist/informant. Within the schema of universal cognitive oppositions, life (as culture) cannot define itself without the dialectical inclusion of its opposite—death (as nature). This formula is derived from Levi-Strauss' assertion that all cultures are concerned with the symbolic appropriation of nature that is perceived as an antithetical domain, as the Other of culture. Through the activity of culture, nature becomes thematized, an object of knowledge, and subjected to discursive representation. We are told implicitly that death as a cultural unit is homologous to nature, which is also a cultural unit. Thus, the anthropological study of death is the description of the appropriation of death as a natural event and as Other by culture. In this process, death is transformed from a natural event, alien and estranging, into a symbolic experience and a central ritual of social life. This process constitutes the internalization of death and nature—insofar as death is a natural phenomenon—by the cultural domain. The above dialectic informs Danforth's perception of the status of specific cultural Others encountered in the fieldwork process.

In advocating for the search of a common humanity beneath the variation of cultures, Danforth tacitly admitted that the anthropologist requires an

accessible cultural Other in order to define himself as an anthropologist. The cultural Other cannot be completely Other, completely unapproachable, completely exoticized or particularized, for then, there would be no mediation or point of contact between the anthropologist and this Other. Just as through symbolic–cultural structures, death becomes mediated, thematized, and an object of knowledge for the living, the cultural Other requires similar levels of connection, relationship, and epistemological formation. Thus, the death of the cultural Other becomes a privileged moment of connection through which "superficial" cultural divisions are overcome.

The paradigm of a "common humanity" here is concerned with the epistemological preconditions for knowing the Other and being able to say something about this cultural Other. These preconditions facilitate the transformation of the cultural Other into an object of theoretical inquiry and allow the anthropologist, as an ethnographer, to "narrativize" the other in texts. It is this "narrativization" of the village of Potamia through structuralist models and journalistic photographs that is the pivotal issue of this ethnography. Taken together, the texts and photos constitute a representation of the death rituals and wider culture of rural Greek villagers. Danforth admits that this representation of the death rituals of Potamia is normative and systematic:

> The format [of the book] is designed to minimize the distance between the reader and the Greek villagers whose life and death are presented here: to enable the reader to come to see these rites not as something distant and exotic but rather in the words of Levi-Strauss as a 'distorted reflection of a familiar image...' (p. 6)

The question, however, remains: Why should the death rites of the Greeks be transposed into a familiar yet distorted reflection or refraction? (The visual metaphor as a paradigm is relevant here.) Why should the cultural Other be brought into greater proximity? And how is this to be accomplished? Danforth seems to be referring as much to Tsiaras' photos and to photography as a form of representation in general as he is referring to the "narrativization" of alien cultures in anthropology. He hoped that, through this book, the reader would transcend the opposition between self and cultural otherness. But this book would certainly supply no transcendence to the villagers of Potamia. The absorption of the villagers of Potamia into common humanity and universal mortality contained no meaning in their society. The people of Potamia already possessed their own strategies for transcending otherness—the mortuary rituals

documented in this study. In peasant eyes, it is these very rituals, in all their specificity, that separate their rural community from the external world, their cultural other. The mortuary rituals of Potamia are rituals of identity and nonidentity, oppositions rooted not in transcultural cognitive pregivens, but in the localized webs of kinship and the symbolic narration of individual deaths through mourning songs.

In the very place that the anthropologist assumes he has opened a passage between self and other, between urban American and Greek peasant, he has actually marked a site of closure between the two societies. The true relevance of this ethnography lies in the absence of such rituals and social relations in our modern society, where death has been deritualized, commodified, and rationalized. This ethnography marked a place of difference and separation between a culture that generated periodic transcendence of otherness through the articulation of symbolic systems and a culture in which only a representation of this transcendence of otherness could be obtained.

The rationalization and commodification of death in our society, which ranges from the possibility of nuclear holocaust to the advanced technology of the modern mortuary, bears witness to a historically determined estrangement from those death–life dialectics that could be encountered in "traditional" societies. The ritualization and symbolization of death does not find its origins in an inner organization of the human mind, as the structuralist argument asserts, but arises out of the historically determined conditions of human existence. Each society produces its own forms of death, both materially and symbolically. The universalization of death is a historical process that is solely a product of our modernity and a symptom of the elevation of our culture into a worldwide value system at the expense of small societies and peripheral cultures.

For Danforth, the primary function of death rituals in rural Greece was the mediation and resolution of the liminal status of both the deceased and relevant mourners. The ritualization of burial and bereavement was posited as a symbolic passage from a marginal condition of mourning and burial, seen by the Greek peasant as polluting, to a nonliminal condition in which the villagers, now purified, return to normal social life. At the same time, the deceased made his final passage from the world of the living to the domain of the dead.

This interpretation of the death process in rural Greece is curiously congruent with the implicit assumption concerning the nature of

fieldwork: since the Greek mourner exists within a liminal, marginalized state between an everyday world and a symbolic, cathartic dimension, the American investigators who, by their very origins, possess a preassigned liminality in relation to Greek village life, can slip into the culture and participate in a shared, communal marginality that facilitates the process of fieldwork. Hence, the assumption that the universality of the death experience obliterates all customary distinctions between outsiders and insiders. In this sense, both Tsiaras and his photographs penetrated the cathartic and symbolic domain of the mortuary ritual. They were supposedly addressing the viewer from an experiential and symbolic center shared by the villagers.

Although **almost any photograph of human social interaction can serve as documentation of ethnographic information, visual ethnography self-consciously subordinates aesthetics to the pursuit of relevant data and the inner reality of another culture**. Tsiaras reversed this paradigm in his photography by privileging his aesthetic perspective at the expense of documentation in order to impose his cultural point of view on these ceremonies. His photographs engaged in a double cultural transgression—first, against the customary formality with which the mortuary rituals were conducted by the villagers, and second, against Danforth's assertions of the breakdown of exclusionary boundaries between the mourners and their American observers.

The unusual and often grotesque angles and perspectives from which some of the photos were taken (see plates 6, 9, 11, 12, 17, and 27) may serve an aesthetic purpose, but they are of questionable ethnographic value. Many of the positions of the photographer are alien to any logical position possibly held by mourners and other involved observers during the ceremonies. The photographer was obviously in search of a visual expressionism referring to, but certainly not congruent with, the ambience of the ceremony. The continuous use of the candid shot, catching the mourners in mid-action and mid-expression (see plates 12, 16, 22, and 23), was unrelated to the extremely formalized and iconographic postures employed by the mourners as crucial components of the ritual. The photographer made the usual erroneous assumption of the Westerner, that cathartic experience necessarily implies the decentering of posture, body movement, or physical gesture. To the contrary, the didactic effect of Greek mourning ceremonies lies in their eloquent alternation between a patterned series of formalized gestures and a flood of emotional outpouring that is constrained and channeled by these movements.

The photographer's visual aesthetics and his focus on the grotesque and distorted were due to his inability to recognize the pattern, order, and meaning in social phenomena that do not belong to his own social world (see his own description of the ceremony, quoted later in this essay). The aesthetic angles employed by the photographer violated the anthropologist's paradigm against exoticizing such rituals. Tsiaras' photos do exoticize the ceremony and function as distinct semiotic boundaries between the mourners and the photographer. The use of such grotesque angles can be seen as an aesthetic device for establishing the documentary realism of the photos. The aesthetic construction of such **documentary realism is antithetical to the scientific requirements of ethnographic documentation** and to the reconstruction of ritual. These aesthetic devices harbor the photographer's own unstated, culturally determined point of view.

At issue here is the nondialogue between the anthropologist, photographer, and Greek peasant. It is the presence of these disparate and often antagonistic discourses that allows us to move beyond the abstract level of aesthetic analysis and methodological discussion toward a reconstruction of the fieldwork process from which this ethnography emerged.

The anthropologist claims that, due to the liminality dominating the mortuary rituals, the photographer, on different occasions, was freely incorporated into the ritual process and cathartic process by the mourners. Yet, the villagers eloquently comment on the discontinuities between the photographer and subjects. In plate 14 of the book, the village priest has halted the burial proceedings in mid-ceremony, just as the coffin was being lowered into the grave. Assuming a stiff pose of benediction—his hand is turned toward the dead, while his face is turned toward the camera—he asks the photographer if he would like to take any more photographs. Danforth reads and interprets the scene in the following way:

> Until that moment the priest had never spoken to Tsiaras; until that day he had never seen him. Tsiaras, the outsider has suddenly taken the place of the deceased as the center of attention. The line between participant and observer had been crossed. The frame of the ritual drama had been broken as the photographer stepped on stage and assumed a role himself. (plate 14)

We must first examine the ruptures within this commentary before turning to an alternative reading and interpretation of what is occurring in the photograph and the significance of the priest's gestures and offer.

Danforth proposed a symbolic equivalence between the two seminal representatives of liminality, the deceased and Tsiaras, the outsider, and this coliminality of the photographer and the dead allowed Tsiaras to step onto the stage and take on a role himself in the ritual:

In the anthropologist's statement, there is an immediate contradiction between his assertion that the frame of the ritual drama has been broken and the assertion that the photographer has stepped on stage and taken on a role, no doubt a formalized ritualistic role. But what stage is present, and for whom can a specific role be played if the drama has been broken? If a new drama has begun, it is obvious that the play of roles is solely between the priest and the photographer. But this interaction is far from being a ritual; it only involves the priest and the photographer, and does so in a manner that excludes the community of mourners. The stage is the creation of the priest, who intentionally dominates it with the appropriate ecclesiastical gesture, a gesture that is all the more duplicitous since, although it is apparently directed toward the dead, it is actually directed toward the photographer.

The anthropologist asserted that Tsiaras had displaced the deceased as the center of attention. To some extent, this is true. The photographer became the center of attention for the priest, for, like the deceased, his presence afforded the priest an opportunity to dramatize his ecclesiastical authority within the mortuary ritual. The priest was the one who assumed stage center, and Tsiaras was confirmed as both outsider and audience in this very gesture. In the background, the women mourners remained in catharsis, ignoring the interaction between the photographer and the priest.

The priest put on a show for Tsiaras precisely because the latter was an outsider. The priest's bid for a central role in the ritual at this moment signified a crucial ethnographic fact ignored by the anthropologist. Throughout the greater part of mortuary ceremonies, it is the women who dominate the ritual and direct the intensity of the catharsis. This is common throughout rural Greece. The arrival of the priest at such ceremonies signifies the intervention of an established, male-dominated religious authority and, for the period during which the priest officiates, the women are forcibly pushed from the center of the ritual process. There is another division within Greek mortuary rituals revealed by this photo but uncommented on by Danforth. Besides the division between official church forms of the burial ritual and the women's mourning style (i.e., cathartic cries, weeping, and the performance of mourning songs), there is also a strong gender division. Men, for the most part, play a peripheral

role: they carry out the coffin, dig the grave, and bury the dead, but it is mainly the women who animate the actual mourning process. In one of the photos, these central actors of the mourning ceremony do not show the faintest awareness or recognition of Tsiaras' presence. As the priest posed for the photographer, the women remained caught within a cathartic state, a liminality unattainable by either the photographer or the priest.

These comments on Danforth's idealization of Tsiaras' fieldwork experiences are exclusively based on the photographs and text contained in *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*. In a separately published article entitled "The Village Funeral" (1983), Tsiaras, writing alone, inadvertently provided material that supports the present critique. It seems that Tsiaras was able to attend this funeral through the aggressive intervention of his aunt, who lived in a nearby village. Contrary to Danforth's commentary, Tsiaras *did* have an extensive conversation with the priest shown in the photo (plate 14) prior to the funeral, and he obtain the priest's permission to photograph the ceremony. During this conversation, the priest revealed the church's attitude toward the role of women in mortuary ceremonies, a view that expresses the symbolic kinship of women with the dead and, at the same time, denies living men any intense access to the symbolic domain inhabited by the women and the dead.

This inclusion of women in the death process and corresponding exclusion of men calls further into question the thesis concerning Tsiaras' symbolic incorporation into the mourning ceremony, because the fact that Tsiaras is a man automatically limited the depth and intensity of his participation in the ritual.

> I pointed to all the men and asked why they did not also remain in the room with the deceased. He (the priest) answered that it was not the custom, and then, as if quoting from the Bible, he said: "Men are born clean and women are born dirty, and the body of the deceased human being is also filthy, so a man should not stay in its presence for long or he too will be contaminated." (Tsiaras 1983, p. 22)

When the ceremony ended, the priest requested copies of the photos from Tsiaras.

Tsiaras' account of the funeral reveals the experiential basis of the aesthetic estrangement that characterizes his photography. Against Danforth's claim for the photographer's incorporation into the ritual, we discover that the

photographer was literally pinched and pushed into it by his aunt:

> When I reached the doorway I hesitated at the wall of people. My aunt pinched my arm…she gave me a push and I struggled forward, but every motion forced someone out…. (Tsiaras 1983, p. 22)

From his first moment of contact with these rituals, the photographer became estranged from what he saw as a grotesque ceremony. This estrangement, as evidenced in his photographs, remained with him in every subsequent encounter with Greek death rituals:

> When I got to the center of the room I could smell the dead boy's odor mixed with a flowery cologne the women used to dissipate the scent of decomposition. This, together with their sweating bodies, produced a stench that was nauseating. I was dizzied by the smell and confused by the mourners singing dirges using words from the wedding ceremony. (Tsiaras 1983, p. 22)

As Tsiaras began photographing the ceremony, the immediate reaction of the deceased's mother demonstrated that his presence and actions violated strict ritual boundaries:

> I lifted my camera. As I prepared to photograph I noticed I now commanded more attention than the corpse, and with the release of the shutter I attracted everyone's stare. The mother pounced towards me, but was blocked behind her dead son, who had now become my protective wall. She screamed, "No photographs!" and waved her arms as if to scratch my eyes out. (Tsiaras 1983, p. 24)

Returning to Danforth's commentary, in plate 30, we find another overt reaction from the villagers to the act of being photographed. The picture shows principal female mourners exhuming the bones of a relative. Danforth described the scene:

> As Tsiaras photographed Matinio [one of the female mourners], she addressed him directly: “we'll all look like this in the end. Some day you'll see the remains of your mother and father exhumed this way. Some day you'll be exhumed, then you'll look like this too. (Danforth 1982, plate 30)

As in the photograph of the officiating priest, the mourner's discourse and pose indicate the nonincorporation of the photographer. They are an ironic acknowledgement of the cultural distance between the mourners and the

photographer, hidden beneath the surface politeness of her offer to pose. The chief mourner, Matinio, stops the exhumation ceremony in order to pose for the photographer. The entire gesture is self-consciously iconographic; and, as a process of image-making, indicates her awareness of the difference between the emotional reality of mourning and photography as a secondhand representation of reality. So, rather than incorporation, the action and discourse of the mourners indicate a recognition of the photographer's alienation and distancing.

It is within the semantic context of the mourner's pose and momentary suspension of the exhumation ceremony that her discourse should be understood, for this discourse contains all the didactic and ironic double meanings that characterize the linguistic handling of social conflict by rural Greeks. She first reminded Tsiaras that we all will *look* like this (i.e., bones and skull) after we are buried. The reference to a visual appearance pointed indirectly to the photographer's own investment in visual realities. The visual investment in itself has been threatening in these situations in Greek culture. It was not customary for an unrelated person, particularly a male, to stare at such crucial ceremonies, since these ceremonies are intrinsic to women's symbolic practice.

She then proceeded to inform the photographer that his parents would also look like this pile of bones after their burial. The introduction of a kinship relation is crucial here, since the entire cycle of death and mourning ceremonies concerns the temporary suspension of kinship stability and the reactivation of kinship bonds. This is effected through rituals that enforce a communal solidarity by invoking the symbolic presence of the absent deceased, whose death has broken the kinship chain. The reference to the potential exhumation of Tsiaras' parents contains within it multiple ironies: Obviously, if his parents' bones were to be exhumed, he would not be able to maintain the same emotional distance indicative of his picture-taking at the current ceremony.

The introduction of the kinship theme and a chronology of the hypothetical burials of Tsiaras' parents and himself may refer to the generational schisms that haunted Greek rural life. Tsiaras, as a member of the younger generation, was perceived as being separated from traditional communality through his lack of involvement in mourning and exhumation rituals; therefore, he was seen as someone unconcerned with the reinforcement and reproduction of kinship solidarity. Matinio invoked a fictional chronology of burial for Tsiaras' family precisely because she suspected that he was estranged from these rituals.

The mourner's discourse was in partial concurrence with Danforth's model in its acknowledgement of a universal inclusiveness of death. But she then proceeded to draw sharp cultural boundaries by invoking the ritualistic mediation of death, which, in the eyes of the mourner, is totally associated with specific transgenerational kinship obligations. The presence or absence of these reciprocities is the foundation for the definition of the community/non-community, we/they, and self/other dichotomies.

In Tsiaras' separate account of another mortuary ceremony, we do find a moment in which there is an attempt to incorporate him into a cathartic domain. Significantly, this attempt is made by a relative, because of the kinship link between them. Tsiaras responds to this attempt of incorporation as follows:

> I didn't know how to react. Too much was happening too quickly. I forced myself not to think about it, but put it aside in my mind until later. (Tsiaras 1983, p. 46)

In conclusion, this study, contrary to its general thrust, documents the confrontation of contrasting cultural realities and the aggressive assertion of the worldview of the Greek peasant through the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, based on kinship, residence, and ritualistic participation in symbolic systems.

But, beyond these interpretive problems, the project also raises serious anthropological issues and seminal preconditions of ethnographic inquiry: The validity of the anthropologist/informant relationship and the subjective experience of fieldwork. The anthropologist must clearly discern the cultural distance separating himself/herself from the collaborating photographer(s), but discern even more clearly the cultural distance separating the latter from the people documented. In the above case, the anthropologist seems to have had a distinctly different experience in the field than the photographer. He was invited to participate in a variety of mortuary rituals and was allowed to record the mourning songs of women. Yet, the validity of his own ethnographic work is undermined by his efforts, through structuralist theorizing, to integrate Tsiaras' photographs into his anthropological perspective.

■

Readings

- Loring Danforth (photography by Alexander Tsiaras). *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982.

- Alexander Tsiaras. ”The Village Funeral,” pp. 21-47. In *Greek Accent,* March 1983.

Notes

(1) Loring Danforth: American cultural anthropologist known for his work in Greece. Professor at Bates College (USA).

(2) A longer version of this essay was first published in the *Journal of Modern Hellenism,* vol. 1, no. 1, 1984.

CHAPTER EIGHT

INTERLUDE: ON BINARY OPPOSITIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGY

The focus on binary oppositions in anthropology was based on the insight that a relatively simple set of oppositions, like left/right, can be elaborated into complex systems of polarity. This is done through the metaphorical extension of one domain of experience to another. The organization of the world and one's conceptual experience in this manner is considered a symbolic organization insofar as there is nothing that mandates that the world should be organized in terms of left and right, and male and female, or that the categorization of the world should be dualistic (binary). Let us recall Geertz's example of American Indian society that recognized more than two genders. The third gender—the hermaphrodite—was as normal as the male and female genders. However, under our own system (based on binary sets), the third gender appears to be deviant and perverse. This deviance is determined in advance, precisely because we organize gender as a dual classification.

The arbitrary aspect of classifying the world in terms of binary polarities is one element of the symbolic character of this type of classification. The second element is the **metaphorization** of these categories as they are transported from one domain of social experience to another. The literal definition of metaphor is to transfer. For example, Levi-Strauss has written a book entitled *The Raw and the Cooked (1964)*, which deals with food classifications. The polarity raw/cooked stands for a culture cooked/nature raw opposition. He then demonstrated how other areas of social life, not explicitly concerned with food or cooking, are understood by certain cultures in terms of whether they are processed or unprocessed, raw or cooked.

A relatively simple but immediate differentiation of interior experience, such as food processing, becomes a medium through which people comprehend the logical order of the world. And this logical order is systematized and disseminated through a process of metaphorization,

based on the original dichotomy (e.g., raw and cooked, or color opposition).

When anthropologists worked in non-Western cultures that did not have the specialization of knowledge and the division of knowledge and labor of our own society, where there was no rigid distinction between thought and action or science and philosophy in everyday practical life, they attempted to show how these cultures think with and through material symbols like raw and cooked in order to organize their world in a manner analogous in complexity to our own specialized, scientific, or philosophical thinking.

Grounded on the principle of cultural relativism, the following studies reveal that binary constructs are culturally constructed.

However, it must be pointed out that this cultural construction presupposes asymmetric relations. Analyses that have, as a starting point, a symmetrical structure of binary pairs have often tended to preclude historical analysis, that is, how the binary pair came into being in the first place.

CHAPTER NINE

(RE)CONTEXTUALIZING THE VISUAL

The third ethnographic study to be analyzed in the context of visual communication in this section is Jean and John Comaroff 's (1) (1987) "The Migrant and the Madman":

> Famous for an ingenious costume that he would never remove, the [mad]man was, literally, a prophet in polythene robes. His crazy clothes spoke the language of his obsession. His boots, standard issue for mineworkers, were topped by intricately knitted leggings, the painstaking product of many unraveled orange sacks. He wore a cloak and a bishop's mitre, fashioned from black plastic garbage bags. Across his chest was stretched a brilliantly striped sash, on which were stitched three letters: SAR. For his white attendants, these were the most obvious signs of his delusion, although they noted that he also "heard" things. The other patients, however, regarded him as an inspired healer, sent to them in their affliction. SAR was his church and he its sole embodiment. The letters stood for South African Railways, alongside whose track the hospital lay. In fact, at the very moment we encountered him, the night train to Johannesburg rattled by with its daily cargo of migrants. Later, as we puzzled to decipher his message, we kept returning, as he did, to SAR. It was a message that spoke directly to his fellow inmates—and also to the black paramedical staff. For, in this world of peasant–proletarians, the railway forged a tangible link between rural and urban life, hitching together the dissonant worlds of the country and the city.
>
> We had long been aware of the importance of the distinction between these worlds for the Tshidi-Barolong, the Tswana people among whom we worked." (Jean and John Comaroff 1987, p. 191)

In this study, the anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff analyzed how the **South African** migrant workers organized their own historical experience through a set of binary material symbols and related linguistic constructs. The anthropologists' purpose was to demonstrate that this

binary classification of history is as complex as any professional historian's and, perhaps, more profound, because it captures the subjective emotional experience of the people who had this experience. It is also more difficult to read than the historian's text, because it involves a different mode of making things into text, one that does not involve alphabetic signs or reading from left to right. It involves, instead, different symbols and objects that require different techniques of reading.

The organization of these symbols and objects, such as the clothing worn by the madman, constituted a text to be read not only by the anthropologist, but also by the local people. In our culture, we have TV, books, or newspapers that tell us how to interpret and experience our recent history. But among the South African migrant workers, whose culture and experience is excluded as illegitimate by the racist South African media and government, other media of information and communication emerge, such as the madman. He is like a walking historical text, a text of his people's history.

The Comaroffs demonstrated that not only is the content of messages developed by oppressed people different from that of the official texts of the dominant society, but also the form and media of communication are other, underground, excluded, and marginal. For this reason, the Comaroffs focused on the messages of the mad—this has been a way of extracting an alternative view of social experience in social sciences during the last decades.

Thus, one way that the Comaroffs used binary oppositions in their study was to understand and present how people express their experiences in South African culture. They also used the binary opposition found in that culture to build their representation of South African realities in order to move their argument from one point to the next. The reading of one text in a culture is what enables the anthropologist to read another. For this purpose, they used the technique of **collage,** of juxtaposing different binary sets.

Thus, the first binary polarity was between the madman and the sane. To be sane in that society was to conform to the oppressive structure of the South African regime, that is, to be silent about certain experiences and events. To be mad was to focus on censored areas of experience and make them visible—although, the madman of the railroad was not completely insane; in fact, he exhibited a level of cleverness and sanity when he encoded his message in an underground language to be understood by

blacks and not whites in South Africa (unless they were anthropologists studying the blacks).

Another polarity was between the peasant and the proletarian. This denoted two forms of economic ways of life, both coexisting with each other, but in which the proletarian way was rapidly replacing the peasant way of life. According to the Comaroffs, therefore, the internal divisions of that society were indicative of historical change.

The next binary opposition, complementary to the previous one, was spatial: country/city. The movement from the peasant to the proletarian way of life involved a spatial transition from country to city. This movement from one space to another, from one economic way of life to another, was made possible by the railroad. The railroad symbolized changes in space and time. The madman wore the symbols of the railroad because his experience focused not on the country or the city, nor on the peasant or proletarian way of life, but on the process of change itself (symbolized by the train). The madman was mad because he was caught between two opposing experiential and value systems, without being wholly part of one or the other system. He was cut off from his peasant tribal origins, but he was neither completely proletarianized nor urbanized. Thus, the railroad, as a mediation between two different ways of life, became the symbol of the madman. Later, the Comaroffs included the physical symbol of the bridge that linked black and white residential sections of a town. This was another symbol of being between. Thus, the madman symbolized ambiguity and unresolved duality, which is precisely why the anthropologists studied the madman as a cultural symbol of the historical experience of his people.

The next binary polarity was work/labor. Work, defined as working for oneself, was associated with the peasant way of life in the country, working for subsistence through cattle herding and crop growing, while labor, defined as working for others, working for money— usually in mines—was associated with the city. Even the etymologies of the two words reflected their dualism: the word for *work* was part of the native language, while the word for *labor* came from the language of White Africans.

When anthropologists pay close attention to the borrowing of one word from one language to another, they look for cultural contact and penetration, as well as the social domains from which words are borrowed

(i.e., economic, religious, political domains, etc.) for these indicate the character of the contact between two cultures.

There was, finally, a temporal binary opposition. The time spent working in the mines was understood as self-destruction, which in turn, was given a spatial characteristic, based on inside/outside dichotomy. Self-constructing work occurred inside, while self-destructive work occurred outside in the white areas of the economy.

Here, one identifies a strong continuity between this study and E.P. Thompson's study (discussed in Chapter 16) on the relation between time and labor discipline in medieval Europe. Both studies focused on **everyday acts of resistance** by workers in industrial spaces, i.e., mines or factories. The authors consider this resistance to work a political, not psychological, issue. It is resistance to particular forms of discipline that emerges in the first place, because the workers have experienced two contrasting, if not contradictory, economic systems: systems of work and systems of time.

Even though past ways of life may be disappearing or destroyed, their memory and symbols can be redeployed in the present in order to show that there are alternatives to the existing systems of domination. The experience of the transformation from past to present, rural to urban, work to labor, and self-construction to self-destruction can inform the passage from present to future as part of a program of liberation.

■

Before the Comaroffs showed how they would read the clothing of the madman as a historical text and what kinds of translation they would use, they had to give us the **context** of the madman and his clothing, that is, the conditions of their possibility.

They stated that, to the Tshidi people, the madman was a prophet. His polythene (plastic) robes resembled the type of clothes worn by members of the Zionist church, a Christian cult among the blacks that attempted to synthesize the traditional and European belief systems and values.

The madman insisted on making connections between two different ways of life in an overt manner that was usually tacit, covert, and perhaps, silenced among the rest of the people. The symbol of the railroad was,

therefore, worn on his chest because the train was what brought him out of this world into another, from one historical period to another, and one economic system to another. Also, the train was the vehicle that allowed him to return from his native self-destruction of the mines to the self-constructive work among his people. But his madness was not a symbol of a complete and exhaustive return. He was in the habit of standing silently in the train station in a white town, where laborers would get off their trains. He was caught between two worlds, which is why he occupied a state of transience and nonpermanence: a railroad station. The madman, linking white and black economies, performed a political gesture against racial, economic segregation, or, by bringing together symbols and signs that were usually kept apart by the dominant culture and economies. When blacks entered the white economy, they were not allowed to bring their families or to settle permanently; they lived in dormitories. All expressions of tribal rural life were excluded and censored.

The madman wore the symbols of self-destructive labor and even the boots of the colonial military police. But he also wore strips of cowhide, magical objects that were used to bind the body in traditional healing rituals. While he signified the latter, he was attempting to signify medical healing—a political, cultural metaphor for the regeneration and repairing of fractured cultural forms and values of the traditional way of life.

The madman appeared to be mad because he wore heterogeneous symbols and contradictory clothing. He used waste objects and discarded bags traditionally used by poor people to remake them into a uniform.

His clothing did not attempt to create a sense of continuity, but rather, a sense of break and irreconcilable contradictions (which is why the healing symbols were used). A person who undergoes conflicting experiences and contradictory beliefs requires healing not to resolve, but to mediate and reconcile the person to the conflict. Jean and John Comaroff interpreted this as the madman's resistance against his incorporation in white society (a resistance also refracted in the practices of the saner Tshidi, such as the accumulation of cattle wealth and involvement in healing cults).

In conclusion, this resistance was an attempt to *not* directly confront the conflicts of neocolonialism, but rather, to make a world that is recognizable beyond the grasp of the colonial system. The madman, in his movement from reason to insanity, also retreated into a personal world, beyond the grasp of colonial domination.

Readings

- Jean and John Comaroff . “The Migrant and the Madman,” pp. 191-209. In *American Ethnologist*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1987.

Note

(1) Jean and John Comaroff: American cultural anthropologists, best known for their ethnographic work in Africa. Professors at Harvard University and, previously, at the University of Chicago.

PART IV:

INSTITUTION VERSUS MEANING

CHAPTER TEN

KINSHIP BONDS: THE AFRICAN/MELANESIAN DEBATE IN MODERN SOCIETY

Anthropology began through the study of tribal communities whose social structure and role relations were based on kinship. Therefore, the anthropological study of social structures became almost synonymous with the study of kinship. Multiple debates and technical literature developed about and around kinship, as most leading figures, in some way or another, dealt with kinship as an idiom of social relations or the organization of economic relations.

The variation in findings, especially among anthropologists studying African societies (known as Africanist anthropologists) and anthropologists studying the societies of Melanesia (Melanesianist anthropologists), decentered the prevalent and taken-for-granted idea that kinship is simply a matter of blood relationship (consanguinity).

Kinship has a dual character. It is a biological base—the blood relation—but, for a society to insure biological reproduction, social interventions must take place in the biological arena. An example of social intervention is the incest prohibition and its complement, out-marrying, which is a regulated interaction between humans.

Biological reproduction of the kin group also entails other factors besides procreation, and these factors are social: Reproduction is identified as the reproduction of economic wealth, such as property transmission; reproduction relates to social values, behavioral values, and survival techniques, in particular, ecologies, the preservation of political authority between generations, and more.

In conclusion, there is no clear-cut distinction between the biological and the social. They are intertwined. Kin relations are mixtures of the

involuntary, the biological, and the voluntary, the social—the material necessity (i.e., group survival) and meaning and values (i.e., culture).

■

How does all this relate or translate to modern society? In other words, how does anthropological knowledge contribute to the understanding of our own world?

David Schneider (1) (1977) focused on **modern America** and showed how categories of American kinship are symbolic ones; they are metaphors, referring to ethics, values, and codes. In his study *"Kinship, Nationality, and Religion in American Culture: Towards a Definition of Kinship,"* Schneider argued that kinship has traditionally been defined as the strategies through which relations by blood or marriage are deployed to fulfill a specific social function—i.e., biological reproduction, transmission of property, and socialization. Yet, although kinship has a biological base, it is exploited to address the social problems dealing with biological reproduction, socialization, property, and social hierarchy.

Yet, biological relations and sexual relations are considered and treated as universal, invariable social facts. In this line of thinking, variations from society to society come into existence in terms of how each social order organizes its cultural strategies in respect to biological determinism (i.e., primogeniture versus partible inheritance or patrilineal succession versus matrilineal succession). Even if a certain tribe believes there is no causal connection between sexual intercourse and conception, its social institutions and rules of marriage are seen as being structured in a certain way that ensures that biological reproduction is taking place. In this model, the emphasis is on how a society organizes and ensures its continuity over time.

Schneider found this model deficient. By granting biological survival with a deterministic value, he claimed, we ignore such questions as how the social units (i.e., kinship units, such as mother–father, child–parent, sister–brother, and husband–wife) that ensure continuity are defined and differentiated from other categories. He posed, therefore, the following question: What meanings and symbols perform this function? He aimed at moving away **from a biological–materialist notion of kinship toward a symbolic and cognitive model** (that is, what kinship means). In this line of thinking, kinship is a form for creating meaning and mobilizing action.

Schneider argued that kinsmen in American culture are those related by blood or marriage. In this sense, Americans have a materialist theory of kinship based on a scientifically derived, common-sense theory of procreation, in which both the mother and father in the active intercourse create a descendant to whom they transmit certain physical and even personality characteristics. Of course, other cultures believe that only the mother (i.e., Jewish culture), or only the father transmits these characteristics.

Schneider identified a contradiction between two components of kinship: blood and marriage. Blood is natural, based on the sharing of biological traits, whereas marriage is legal, based on a contractual relation. Blood ties can never be terminated, but marriages can. "Persons related by marriage are not related in nature" (Schneider 1977, p. 65). Thus, relations by marriage are organized by rules of conduct, as opposed to blood relations, whose conduct is not determining but rather determined by blood. In blood relations, the code of conduct is derived by nature.

As such, Schneider identified two overarching categories of social relations in American society: those that fall within the larger class of the order of blood, genetic code, and shared material substance, and those that fall within the class of the order of law, composed of rules, customs, and traditions. Thus, the two parts of kinship are parts of larger totalities, or the two major orders of which the world is composed: law and nature. This is the worldview of modern Americans.

How do these two orders relate? To answer this, Schneider turned to the example of love. He looked at love as a cultural construct of the American kinship system. The concept of love is divided into two orders: law and nature. There is *conjugal love*, which relates to marriage (under law) and *cognatic love*, which is based on blood relations. The former is erotic; the latter is not. The former refers to the unity of opposites; the latter refers to the identity of the same. Love, then, as a symbolic construct in American society, is a heterogeneous notion that mediates between the order of nature and the order of law by linking conjugal and cognatic love.

Schneider proceeded to expand his definition of American kinship from interpersonal relations to the category of the domestic unit (household). The latter is heterogeneous, too; it is a mixture of nature and law. He focused on *home versus work,* which he related to *love versus money* and *family versus society*. Money is impersonal, material, and universal, distinct from any notion of emotions, sentiments, or morality; thus,

relations based on money are temporary and impermanent. On the other hand, relations based on love are personal, emotional, and, ideally, permanent; they are concerned with the identity of the person and are based on the quality of the person's performance.

His next step was to expand to the wider society; thus, he explored two other categories of American social life: nationality and religion. In America, one is a citizen either by birth (by blood) or by a legal process called naturalization—a legal metaphor of the blood relation. Citizenship by birth or naturalization replicates this dualism between the orders of law and nature, which are the components of American kinship. The term naturalization implies that law imitates the model of biology as nature. Citizenship displays the same ethic of solidarity and unity, which is valued within the blood/marriage relationships—the citizen is supposed to love his father- or motherland. Patriotism is seen within a biological kinship model: "kinship and nationality are structured in identical terms" (Schneider 1977, p. 68). This does not mean that kinship is biological and nationality is legal, but that the biological domain and the legal–political domain are linked by the same set of kinship symbols: nature and culture.

Concluding, Schneider viewed the domain of kinship as divided into biological symbols and symbols related to a code of conduct (rules of behavior). In turn, this duality characterized other systems of solidarity, such as nationality and religion. If this is true, he claimed, there is no difference among religion, nationality, and kinship in American life; the differences arise out of how they are combined and/or transformed when entering relations with other "pure" domains, such as work or money.

Based on this study, it becomes clear that values are relational. The anthropologist cannot define the characteristics of any domain, e.g., economy, in isolation from others. But **turning the values of kinship inside out, one can see how people view the economic and/or the political domain.**

There may be a discrepancy between how the economic domain works in practice and the picture the anthropologist has of it from the perspective of kinship. But we all are influenced by the kinship norms, because, in our biographies, we move from kinship to the economic domain. We have been acculturated to see the economic from the perspective of kinship.

Nationality and religion are also metaphors for the family group. They emphasize solidarity and permanent relations, whereas economy does not.

Therefore, they come into conflict. What happens, for instance, when one goes into business with his or her family? Kinship, in this case, may attempt to mediate the economic domain by injecting some of its values (e.g., solidarity).

■

Schneider's anthropological study (also Ginsburg's in Chapter 24), presented a much more sophisticated approach on kinship and family in modern society than many studies in social and political sciences. For Schneider's approach diverted from the usual views from the outside and provided an internal and more complex picture of the reality of the so-called developed urban societies.

Several social and political scientists, who favored North/South or center/periphery and developed/underdeveloped categorizations of societies, attributed an economic–technological and political "retardation" of the South to its cultural codes relating to kinship and the family. The cultural code of **amoral familism**, for example, was introduced by Edward Banfield (2) as being characteristic of Mediterranean societies. He defined it as the regulator of people's behavior, aiming at maximizing "the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family" (Banfield, 1968, p. 83); thus, Mediterranean people have been distrustful of outsiders and "fickle" in their political acts. This cultural characteristic has been contrasted with those of developed cultures whose citizens look beyond their self-interests and those of their family and friends and can engage in collective projects. Amoral familism has also been considered to be responsible for traditionalist or modern religious nationalisms.

This approach, grounded on the 19th century idea of progress, implies that development is a move away from an introverted amoral familism and nationalism and toward a modern (European) transfamilial, constitutional democracy. This is a simplified view of development, a view from the outside. (See also the discussion on development in Chapter 16).

Readings

- Edward C. Banfield. 1958. *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.

- David M. Schneider. "Kinship, Nationality, and Religion in American Culture: Towards a Definition of Kinship," pp. 63-71. In *Symbolic Anthropology: A Reader in the Study of Symbols and Meanings.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

Notes

(1) David M. Schneider (1918-1995): American cultural anthropologist and a major proponent of the symbolic anthropology approach. Professor at the University of Chicago.

(2) Edward C. Banfield (1916-1999): American political scientist. Served as advisor to three Republican presidents: Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. Professor at Harvard University and elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Melanesian Examples

The anthropologist Andrew Strathern (1) (1973) studied a New Guinea society. Like David Schneider, he distinguished between the biological and the cultural in terms of kinship. Concretely, he differentiated between the "base line of genealogical connection" (biological descent) and kinship as a set of social relations: Kinship uses genealogical relationships to construct social relations. Biological descent, in itself, is not a social relation.

Also, like Schneider, he emphasized kinship as a set of meanings and values. This is important, because in New Guinea, where he conducted research, biological relations were fictionalized for the purpose of creating social relations.

We see that kinship was divided into two dynamic categories and approaches: The *ideational,* concerned with the rules of kinship affiliation and its forms, such as matrilineal–patrilineal, and the *transactional*, concerned with how these rules are or are not deployed in practice. These two basic approaches reflected the different emphasis in American and British anthropological schools (as discussed in Chapter 1): culture, defined as ideational norms and values and social structure, defined as transactional relations.

Andrew Strathern found a similar dichotomy between the indigenous theories of kinship and the practice of kinship within a society, and between kinship as a system of symbols and meanings and the way the social units of kinship are deployed in action. The metaphor he used is theatrical: the system of symbols and meanings is equivalent to the theater stage, the set, the design, and the cast of characters; the social transaction is equivalent to the stage directions for the actors, how they play the script, the roles they assume, and how these elements interconnect.

The distinction between the local theories of kinship and kinship put into practice implies that kinship categories are ideological. They have no fixed meaning, and their definitions and functions are adapted to changing circumstances. Kinship is a type of language by which people talk about other issues in their lives, such as the economy or ecology.

This definition of kinship meant a profound break with the tradition of kinship studies that developed in Africa in the first half of the 20th century. This break was effected when new scholars trained by Africanist anthropologists went to conduct research in New Guinea. When they tried to apply African models of kinship to New Guinea situations, they simply failed.

■

Which was **the Africanists' model**?

The Africanists defined social anthropology as a study of social structure, which was to be separated from customs, symbolic systems, material culture, and mythology. Social structure, in turn, was defined as the constitution of groups in society through the allocation of roles, rights, and obligations, whose main function was to maintain continuity. We can see, therefore, how kinship fits in this definition not as a biological system, but as a legal one.

Since kinship was a legal system concerned with rules, contractual relations, fixed hierarchies that organize roles, rights, and obligations, kinship categories had to be understood in precise and fixed terms of a social charter, or an agreement to be together, analogous to legal codes. Kinship, defined in legal terms, did not allow for a distinction between theory and behavior, because behavior that deviated from kinship norms and rules was subjected to sanctions.

In the African model, individual identity was based on corporate identity—the individual's position in a lineage or segment of a larger kinship group. According to the Africanists, therefore, descent was the basis of political identification. Settlement and territory were legitimized by the identification of this territory with an ancestor. Different groups had hierarchical privileges in relation to their genealogical proximity to this ancestor.

From this model, the two most important aspects one must retain are: the collective or corporate identity of the individual, which is understood as the legal identity, and the use of a descent relation to establish a political hierarchy within a social order. The basic political hierarchy was agnation: the rules by which individuals attached their identity and their political status to a singular male ancestor. This led to a long-term genealogical memory. These records, which were kept orally, have been understood by anthropologists to be legal codes and charters that established collective identity.

There were two reasons why the Africanists picked this approach. One reason had to do with the fact that the early arm-chair anthropologists–theorists in England—for example, Sir Henry Maine and John F. McLennan—were trained in comparative jurisprudence, which focused on

inheritance, marriage, succession, and inheritance in different societies. Maine was interested in how the colonization of India by England and the imposition of English law on Indian law would instigate the evolution of the legal structure of Indian society toward the English model (evolution of legal systems). The second reason was that many anthropologists working in Africa during the first half of the 20th century had strong connections to the British colonial administration, the policy of which was called "indirect rule"; that is, the British government would exercise political economic administrative control over local ethnic groups by inserting the leaders of these groups into colonial administrative positions. This was problematic in East Africa. East African groups were not organized in kingdoms as the West African ones, and they had no definable leadership positions or roles; they were, thus, acephalous (headless) societies. The Africans tried to identify the principle of hierarchy and political control in these societies in such a manner that the British could make the latter susceptible to administrative control. Thus, today we feel that they overemphasized the principles of agnation and the rigidity of kinship terms, because they were indirectly pressured to demonstrate how these structures could be politically deployed.

■

After WWII, anthropologists working in **New Guinea** attempted to apply this Africanist legalistic model. This resulted in confusion. First of all, the principle of agnatic descent was present, but very weak in New Guinea. Genealogical memory was shallow, going back to three generations at the most. The rules of descent alone did not entitle one to membership in a corporate group. People did have corporate identities, but these were not based on descent. Clan groups were identified as the salient corporate groups linked to specific territories, engaging in warfare, and performing ceremonial exchanges (economic and marriage) with other clan groups. But what marked these groups from the corporate groups in Africa was the people's allegiances, which were easily changing and switching from one group to another. Clans were, in part, founded on shared subsistence, which passed from ancestors to descendants in the form of blood and semen. On the other hand, *clan* was defined as a transactional structure by which people and corporate groups interacted. Thus, when the New Guinea highland people talked about clan, the term was used polysemically. It could refer to an organization whose members were linked by shared substance through ancestral transmission, or it could refer

to a transactional system, usually of ceremonial exchange, between individuals who had no linkage by blood. Complementary to this, anthropologists noted that New Guinea people often engaged in individual exchange relations that did not involve corporate groups. In this system, people who were included in the local group would not be included in the clan category, even though they took their corporate identity from the clan group. At the same time, people who had biological linkages to a clan group would take their corporate identity from another clan group with which they had no blood connection. Membership in the clan category did not automatically mean operational membership in the corporate group defined as clan.

Shared substance is the key to understanding how this system worked. Shared substance links people together and facilitates the construction of their collective identities. But it can be transmitted in several ways: as blood and semen from ancestors to descendants, as the sharing of land and food, and as semen between non-related men in homosexual relations. The ideology of shared substance allowed the New Guinea people to play with the duality of residence and descent in such a manner that one category, residence, was converted into the other, descent. Whole generations were transferred from one category to another because of the reciprocities of shared residence. The system worked as follows: two groups, non-agnates, originating in other clans in the first generation, participated in the relation of shared substance through a joint land cultivation and the ceremonial exchanges of food and brides. In the second generation, one of these groups of non-agnates would be fictionally incorporated into the descent genealogy of the other.

In conclusion, this type of agnation, known as **fictive kinship,** existed in New Guinea because it was an unstable society characterized by warfare, groups were not sedentary, and land cultivation was constantly expanding. Therefore, there was an ongoing need for groups to enlarge their labor supply and recruit warriors. In this system, New Guinea people would use the language of descent and its metaphors of shared substance to talk about and characterize the transactional relations and exchanges of individuals and groups who had no relation of biological descent. This is why kinship categories in New Guinea are described as polysemic, that is, signifying two different things with the same term.

■

Turning to Europe, we can detect the Melanesian model operating in modern Greece and Ireland as studied by C. Nadia Seremetakis (1991) in Inner Mani, and Robin Fox (1978) on Tory Island, respectively.

Robin Fox (2) studied Tory Island, in **Ireland,** from 1961 to 1964. **Tory Island** (Toraigh) lies six miles off the Donegal coast in Northwest Ireland and is two and a half miles long and a mile wide; out of its 785 acres, only 250 are cultivatable. The archipelagos of islands Tory belongs to and the adjacent coastal areas are known for having long retained archaic material culture (including partible land inheritance and minimal farming technology) and folk traditions, along with the Gaelic language. For over a thousand years, the Tory Island society, approximately 500 people, existed on the fringe of European history. Today, a few thousand little islands around the world, whose inhabitants amount to more than 500,000 people, still remain on the fringe of European history and society.

When Fox arrived on the island, he encountered the last remnants of one of the oldest traditions of the island, the recitations of genealogies by a small group of elderly men, locally named in Gaelic *sloinnteori*. The recitation was performed as a mnemonic chanting. Each genealogy was recited as a gestalt, and any attempt by Fox to pause the recitation to examine a part of it led to the memory failure of the reciter.

Fox admitted he was only concerned with the social organization of the island and not its culture; therefore, he, unfortunately, provided no information about the biography of the reciters or their learning processes.

Genealogical reckoning was based on the identification of an apical ancestor, but the criteria, as Fox admitted, suffered many modifications. For example, the rationale for the exclusion of ancestors from the genealogies was related to the primary function of the recitations, which was to document biological relations, but also to serve as a juridical referent to the history of landholding, land division, and marriages. Kinship was divided by blood and contractual relations (“my people are my friends and my relatives”), as with the New Guinea people.

The ideal goal of a genealogist was to link all of the islanders to an ancestor. The capacity of each individual lineage to converge to an apical ancestor revealed the success of that lineage in the consolidation of landholdings over a two-hundred-year period. Discontinuity in the lineage recitation meant discontinuity in the history of their landholdings.

The genealogists on the island knew the full genealogical line of each individual and recited it by memory. They would, thus, indicate who had land, who had inherited by whom, who had the right to claim land by whom, and so on. Interestingly, if one did not pass on land or receive land by others (if one, for instance, died childless), he would vanish from the genealogy.

On Tori Island, the household was the central social unit, and there was no separate word for the nucleated family. *Teaglash* was a term that could mean both family and household, and there was no conceptual distinction made between the two categories by the islanders. Likewise, there was no distinction between the corporate group and the household. People belonged to several clans, from their mother's and their father's side (bilateral kinship was in operation). Kinship, thus, was polysemic.

The way people were named indicated kin affiliation. They divided kin into relations by blood and relations of reciprocity. They had, therefore, two naming systems, one dealing with the relations of descent and another dealing with the relations of everyday transactions. First and last names were not used. The person connected his first name to that of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. A full genealogical name would proceed as follows: *Nora-Thomas-John-John-eoin-Neilli*; it covered six generations and culminated in one of the apical ancestors on the island. The whole sequence was pronounced as one name. Thus, there was a blending of the individual identity with the corporate group.

Another way of solidifying corporal identity was by the taking of the first name of the grandparents by the first children (the same holds in Greece). Corporal identity was embedded in one's name. One could choose the chain names (ancestors) either from the mother's or the father's side. The choosing of a lineage was crucial for obtaining land and other forms of assistance from kinsmen.

The importance of naming had to do with the scarcity of land. All children inherited after their parents' death (partible inheritance). It follows that, if one wanted access to land before one's parents grew old or if one needed to enlarge his land, he or she could claim land by linking himself or herself to another side of the family and by choosing names to show this link.

In everyday life, people used a shorter name, a transactional one. Until recently, the name/surname combinations had been utilized only for official documents and tombstone carvings.

In conclusion, kinship was strategically used to get around the rules of inheritance. And this was done by exploiting the polysemic character of kin categories.

■

Readings

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- C. Nadia Seremetakis. *The Last Word: Women, Death and Divination in Inner Mani*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

- Andrew Strathern. “Kinship, Descent and Locality: Some New Guinea Examples,” pp. 21-35. In *The Character of Kinship* by Jack Goody, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Notes

(1) Andrew Strathern: British social anthropologist. Professor at Pittsburgh University (USA).

(2) Robin Fox: Anglo-American anthropologist known for his studies on Tory Island, Ireland. Professor and founder of the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers University (USA).

PART V:

ECONOMY AND EXCHANGE

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ECONOMICS AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Economics is a domain where ethnocentrism is very hard to break. This is partly due to the fact that we all live within a particular economic system, capitalism, whose values and processes we assume to be universal. One symptom of ethnocentrism is the very specification and separation of the economic from other areas of social life. We already saw how this operates in David Schneider's discussion of kinship and the economic domain, which embody opposite values and social relations.

David Schneider described the polarity between the public domain, where economic relations are located, and the private domain of family and emotions, where affective social relations take place. This is a division of society we have all grown up in. But this split between the public and the private, the economic and the social, is both historically and culturally relative. There are many societies in several periods of history where the social and the economic have been identical, where labor production, exchange, and the consumption of goods and objects occurred in the same social space.

Another ethnocentric belief is that economic processes concern the accumulation of wealth by individuals. This is a basic tenet of our society, but there have been other societies where the accumulation of wealth, of what economists call surplus, was understood to have specific upper limits beyond which accumulation made no sense whatsoever. There have also been societies where one's purpose of accumulating wealth (objects, things) was to get rid of it, or to exchange it with other people as a way of maximizing one's social networks or of expanding the gauge of the self through relations with others.

Anthropology dealing also with cultures and economies other than those of the modern West had begun to look at **economies as another system of social relatedness, analogous to kinship and language**. But before we even consider economics as a form of social relations, we must understand

economic activity first, as a self-relation and second, as a relation between nature and culture.

Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx understood economic activity as human labor and production by which men transform nature into a cultural domain.

We have already seen this transformation of nature in the discussion of kinship, in which biological reproduction is transformed through the injection of meaning and norms into a cultural system called kinship. Nature is the material world, and people must transform it to produce the social world. The objectification of nature by labor is also the objectification of the person. Through work as a creative activity, **people embody their self-identities into material objects**. That is why, in certain primitive societies, economic exchange and the transfer of work objects, as well as produced food, tools, and crafts, were understood to be extensions of the person and to be a social exchange. These work objects could never be totally detached from their creator, and when given to another, they functioned as a substitute symbol of their creator. Thus, economists and anthropologists make a distinction between the **use value** of the object produced in labor and the **exchange value**. The use value is concerned with how the hunted or harvested food facilitates the ongoing biological reproduction or survival of the individual or group that consumes it. The exchange value is concerned with a system of measurement by which one object's value is equated with the value of another work object of a completely different character—for example, how many pairs of shoes are equal to one winter overcoat.

In our society, we interpose a third object that establishes relations of value, equivalence, or analogy between the shoes and winter coats: money. We do not exchange shoes for winter coats; rather, we exchange money for shoes or winter coats. Money symbolizes the relation of value we place between shoes and overcoats. Many societies operated without money. Also, they may have traded shoes and overcoats not because they only wanted to possess them, but because they wanted to establish relations with others.

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Exchange entails social relations, but so does **production**. Different social relations are required in order to produce food by hunting, growing, and manufacturing. Production, therefore, is concerned with how human

groups create and distribute material goods. These different techniques are known as modes of production, and they vary from society to society.

Two modes of production have just been described: The first is the domestic mode of production, where all of the work activity, production, and consumption occur in the same sphere, the domestic. The second mode of production, the accumulation of wealth by individuals, involves a split between the public and private domains—the individual goes out to the public domain to sell his/her labor.

The various types of technology involved, as well as the ways by which surplus goods are distributed, exchanged, or transformed into other goods, specify a mode of production. But the basic determinant of a mode of production is known as the **division of labor**. Every society identifies different labor tasks, functions, and roles in terms of gender, age, and skill. Even in the early prehominid groups, there was a fundamental division of labor between the males, who hunted, and the women, who foraged (gathered). The demands of nurturing and nursing the young and the long developmental process of human infants meant that females had to remain closer to camps and, thus, extract food supplies from the immediate environment. This is in contrast to hunting, whereby males had to wander far from the camps. This division, known as *primate specialization,* was, in many ways, biologically determined.

Archaeologists have demonstrated that the foraging and scavenging of women actually supplied the basic foods, because it was a more dependable subsistence strategy than that of hunting. The divisions of labor could extend beyond gender or sexual divisions to include age relations and specific ecological adaptations—i.e., one group could extract a specific food source because of its technology or relation to ecology.

As we move from societies in which production and consumption occur within the same familial, domestic, or residential group to societies like our own, where there are divisions between public and private domains and where technology is different, the division of labor becomes more specialized. The division of labor is concerned with the collective or individual character of labor, for this carries a very strong influence on social relations. For instance, we saw in David Schneider's study that the collective character and values of American kinship could come into conflict with the highly individualistic and competitive character of social relations in the economic domain.

In short, for the Marxists, the modes of production are divided into: a) The forces of production, which include the available technology and tools concerned with production and distribution and the capacities of the natural environment; b) The relations of production, such as the division of labor, the social relations people enter into to carry out the tasks of production, distribution, and consumption. Certain theorists believe that historical change in a society is brought about by the transformation of both the forces and relations of production. In some cases, these two factors can be in conflict, thus, causing internal social and political struggles in a society. For example, automation technology, as a force of production, conflicts with our social relations of production, which assert that labor is a human process and that all human beings should be employed.

In conclusion, many Marxist theorists claim that legal institutions, religious systems, kinship, art, and culture are, in effect, expressions of the relations of production. Thus, all social relations can be reduced to economic relations. Anthropologists have disputed this, based on their long experience of nonwestern cultures. Social relations in other cultures are not reducible to economic relations; besides, economic relations are often subordinate to institutions like kinship. The reduction of social relations to economic relations is a particular historical development of the West, which is imposed throughout the world.

The argument comes down to whether economic practices reinforce and/or determine the values of a social structure like kinship, or whether kinship and other social structures are symbolic and ideological expressions of economic relations. Karl Polanyi's argument, which follows, offers a way out of this "social structure or economy" controversy.

The Semantics of Money Uses

For Karl Polanyi (1) (1977), economic relations are not only social relations, but also symbolic relations. Money is a system of symbols, like language and writing. Economic relations and practices are communicative. People send messages back and forth to each other through the exchange of money and other economic objects.

First, money is a substitute for other objects. This establishes its first symbolic function. Second, money is used to fulfill obligations; the relations of obligation and debt are social relations (i.e., expected behavior concerned with norms and values). Third, money equalizes the two sides in exchange. It creates a balance; it establishes a value that does not only measure the worth of a particular object, but also imposes norms on the social relations of those who exchange objects.

Polanyi demonstrated the cultural relativism of money by showing how the symbolic character of money can be reversed. Money could stand for grains in Babylonia, but at a certain point in Babylonian history, the exchange of grains stopped symbolizing the exchange of money, because of the scarcity of money and of gold and silver. Once money was established as standing for grain, the latter could be a substitute for money.

Furthermore, Polanyi established money as a form of communication and language: Money, language, and writing follow a code of rules, a correct way for using the symbol. He called this "grammar," that is, the prescribed way for using money (e.g., exchange, surplus value, etc.).

Finally, he defined money as a set of quantifiable objects that serve as a means of exchange. Money is used as a means of payment, as a standard of value, and as a means to store surplus wealth, all of these uses depending on the institutional character of money as a medium of exchange:

Money as payment is defined as the fulfillment of an obligation through the transference of a quantifiable object (money). This definition of money connects it with the fulfillment of kinship obligations and legal obligations. In societies like Africa, kinship and legal institutions would be identical. Therefore, the use of money is determined by other social institutions, like kinship, in terms of its role of fulfilling obligations. Obligations in the kinship or legal systems are founded on the rules for restoring balance, whether this involves the inheritance of land, the sharing of food, or the payment for a transgression.

There are many ways to fulfill this obligation, i.e., by exchanging gifts, exchanging women in marriage alliances, or exchanging laments in ritual performances. Money quantifies the fulfillment of obligation by giving it a specific measurable quality. Payment to restore balance also implies a hierarchical relation between the agent who pays and the agent who receives the payment. In this sense, money involves political relations, as well.

Money as a standard of value refers to money as a communicative unit. It requires greater mobility and facilitates greater communication if it can be substituted for all other objects that are valued in that society. It facilitates the extension of social relations. This is part of the political uses of money.

Political power can shift with the change of a standard of value in a society. For example, if the standard is seashells, certain groups may be in a technological or ecological position to accumulate more seashells; this becomes their political power. But if this standard shifts to human slaves, another group can benefit, and this shifts the political power. Thus, one group, to consolidate its power, can impose shifts in the standard of value on another group.

In conclusion, the character of the economy in many primitive societies and economies is based on the relations of debt and obligation of a noneconomic nature—which form the basis of institutions, such as kinship, marriage, and religion.

Relations of debt and its fulfillment are mechanisms for reinforcing the collective interdependence of people within the institutions of kinship or religion. Thus, payment and exchange often occur as ceremonial performances that dramatize the collective interdependence of a social group. In this context, economic behavior that emphasizes self-interest at the expense of others, that diminishes collective interdependence, is considered negative. The ritualization of relations of debt and obligation functions in such a manner as to marginalize or exclude individual autonomy and to emphasize collective interdependence.

This is the noneconomic function of the economy in primitive societies, which will also be encountered in Weiner's study (in the next section).

Readings

- Roger Keesing. "Economic Systems," pp. 177-211. In *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective*. (2nd edition). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981.

- Karl Polanyi. "The Semantics of Money Uses," pp. 394-411. In *Symbolic Anthropology: A Reader in the Study of Symbols and Meanings.* Edited by Janet Dolgin, David Kemnitzer, David Schneider. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

- C. Nadia Seremetakis. "The Economy of Dreams," pp. 61-63. In *The Last Word: Women, Death and Divination in Inner Mani.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Note

(1) Karl Polanyi (1886-1964): American–Hungarian economic anthropologist, historian, sociologist, political economist, and social philosopher. Known for his cultural approach to economics. Taught at Columbia University.

Gift Exchanges

Gift-giving is a behavior found in almost all human societies. Marcel Mauss (1) (1990), in his well-known study of the exchange of gifts in primitive societies, identified **the gift as a central social fact**.

Marcel Mauss was influenced by his teacher Durkheim (2) and his idea that the object of sociology is the study of autonomous social facts. Mauss and Durkheim defined **social fact** as any autonomous phenomenon in a society that permits objective, empirical, and comparative analysis.

Let us clarify these terms first. Here, **objective** means that the social fact involves behaviors and actions that everybody in a society recognizes as existing or as real. **Empirical** refers to those social processes or behaviors that an outside observer could identify as occurring, but that may not be things that the members of a society have explicit consciousness of—for example, grammatical rules in language that natives practice unconsciously, but that linguists can identify and abstract. **Comparativity** means that the social fact is a set of behaviors, actions, and meanings that are understood as analogous to or juxtaposed with the behaviors and actions from another society.

For Durkheim and Mauss, social facts can explain complex patterns of economic, religious, aesthetic, and psychological behavior. Thus, Mauss, after studying gift-giving in a variety of cultures, concluded that the transfer of objects between individuals or groups is, in effect, a complex interaction of social roles and statuses. This interaction is based on a three-part process that characterizes all gift exchanges: the obligation to give, to receive, and to repay.

Gift exchanges appear to be voluntary, spontaneous, and unmotivated, but in fact, they are obligatory, planned, ritualized, and patterned (that is, following a scenario like a play) in most societies. They often reflect private or collective political interests. Mauss concluded that gift exchange involved individuals in complex webs of social interactions, and it aimed at increasing social solidarity.

Karl Polanyi had already commented on this, for he stated that, in those societies where gift exchange predominated, the individual accumulation of private wealth was considered destructive to collective social values.

For Marcel Mauss, gift exchanges were crucial to segmentary societies—that is, societies in which closed corporate groups determined an

individual's identity and affiliation. In this case, gift exchange facilitated the opening of the closed corporate groups (determined by blood or descent) to each other. We already saw an example of this in Andrew Strathern's discussion of shared substance (i.e., exchange of food), which allowed people from different kin groups to form a new descent lineage or segment.

In conclusion, gift exchanges were independent of economic necessity. In primitive societies, economic practices, which appear to be irrational or destructive from a purely economic point of view, were, in fact, activities that contributed to the promotion of social cooperation. The Indian tribes in the Northwestern US and Canada are an example of this. Those tribes would accumulate blankets and other goods for *potlatch* ceremonial exchanges, in which goods would be exchanged between individuals who would then destroy the gifts received. These exchanges were forms of communication between individuals, which established their status in a society. The Canadian government banned these exchanges as economically wasteful activities. This caused the social solidarity and social ties of these tribal groups to fall apart.

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Readings

- Marcel Mauss. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies.* Translated by W.D. Halls. New York: Routledge, 1990 (orig. 1925).

Notes

(1) Marcel Mauss (1872-1950): French sociologist, particularly known for his studies on gift exchange, sacrifice, and magic in various cultures. Professor of Sociology at the Collège de France.

(2) Emile Durkheim (1858-1917): French sociologist and philosopher. Known as the father of sociology. Professor and Chair of the Science of Education and Sociology at the Sorbonne University (Paris).

The Trobriands

Bronislaw Malinowski (1) (1922), who studied the Trobriands off the coast of New Guinea, in Melanesia, agreed with Mauss that exchange systems operated independently of an economic logic.

The Trobriands were dominated by *warrior-redistributor chiefs,* whose power lay in their role as distributors of land. They would marry the sisters of a large number of headmen (heads of lineages under the chief) from their own clan groups. The chief's power derived from the fact that men distributed agricultural products. Women inherited the land on which these products were grown. Thus, land passed from women to women. This defined inheritance as matrilineal. Men had to give portions of their agricultural production to their sisters, who inherited the land. The husbands of the sisters controlled this produce. Therefore, the chief who was married to several women had access to economic wealth (yams). He would distribute yams in elaborate feasts, which continued the cycle of economic exchange and promoted the loyalty of the chief's followers.

Malinowski focused on what was known as *kula* trade networks. These were exchange rituals that the Trobriand men engaged in with men from other islands nearby. These *kula* rituals forced a reevaluation of the European notion of economic man, that is, of the social agent who pursues his individual interests by an accumulation of wealth. At that time, the 1920s, this European model was understood to be universal. It was an evolutionary standard set by European culture and introduced to the Third World.

Malinowski challenged this definition, because *kula* rituals revealed that the vast complex networks of *kula* exchange involved the exchange trade of objects that had no practical value in those societies (what was termed "use value" in Chapter 11). For instance, men exchanged decorative stone axes and canoes.

Kula exchanges were public ceremonial events that involved lifelong relations between fixed partners who were tied by reciprocal obligations and privileges. These exchanges allowed Trobriand men to heighten their status in society, because they introduced exotic objects from the outside. Due to their foreignness, these objects had a special, even magical, value, independent of functional use.

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Almost five decades after Malinowski, Annette Weiner (2) (1976) embarked on a field research in the Trobriands. In the period separating Malinowski's fieldwork from Weiner's, there was a decline of redistributor chiefs. This occurred because the colonial administration ended warfare between different local factions. This diminished the status of the chiefs, who were the leaders. There was also an increasing entry of western market goods into the Trobriand Islands. This provided the islanders with alternative economic resources and liberated them from a dependency on the economic practices of the chiefs. As a result, there was a diminishment of the elaborate feasts that Malinowski had described earlier. This allowed Weiner to focus on other areas of Trobriand life that extended beyond male spheres of activity.

Malinowski had studied the Trobriands with specific assumptions. Borrowing from African studies of kinship, he saw (patrilineal) descent systems as the dominant form of social organization. Consequently, he described male/female relations solely in terms of descent relations in which women had a lower status and a gender division of labor, in which men dominated the prestigious economic practices.

Weiner launched a critique of the dominance of descent relations by reinterpreting the meaning of *dala. Dala*, for Malinowski, was a process by which the ancestral spirit was transmitted to lineage descendants by an inheritance of properties. Weiner, instead, identified two forms of *dala. Dala* for women was not concerned with the inheritance of property, but rather, with the regeneration and recycling of ancestral spirits by exchange. There were no automatic rights over *dala* land, based on descent. These rights had to be negotiated through exchange cycles with *hamlet managers* (land managers).

Thus, Weiner, by examining the inheritance of garden lands (by women), changed the model of Trobriand society, which was previously presented by Malinowski as a model of male-dominated, economic, genealogical political institutions. She divided Trobriand society into a male-dominated, economic–political domain, tied to descent and a cosmological domain, associated with women and concerned with exchange relations. Trobriand women controlled the cultural resources, and they possessed cultural power that they dramatized through exchange rituals. These rituals were equivalent to the economic–political spheres dominated by men.

She focused on how shared substance, such as the communal consumption of food and nurturance, was divided by male/female spheres of control and

how it symbolically extended to other areas of Trobriand society outside of kinship. The control of shared substance and the dramatization of its possession were expressed through exchange relations, or what she called symbolic exchange.

Each individual in Trobriand society, moving through a life cycle, passed through different stages, such as childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, birthing, and death. Moving though this life cycle, the individual acquired social artifacts from others. At each important phase of the life cycle, the persona of the individual was transformed, as artifacts detached from others in the gift-giving and invested in the self.

Exchange cycles and gift-giving signaled and commemorated important changes in the social status of the individual as he/she moved from one stage of the life cycle to another. This passage involved two processes: fission and fusion. In other words, as the person moved from one state to the next, he/she separated, or fissioned, from one set of exchange relations and social networks and entered another (fusion). Both this separation and entry involved the exchange of material wealth.

Death was an important event that precipitated exchanges, precisely because death involved the suspension of social relations between two people or groups that were based on the connection provided by the third party, the dead. The death of a member of an exchange network left a gap in that network and had implications that could render all social relations tenuous and unstable. There was no such thing as individual death in Trobriand society.

Exchange events restored the rupture created by death. In mortuary ceremonies, Trobriand women gave away material wealth that they manufactured in order to liberate the dead from the obligations of social networks in the male economic–political sphere. They gave gifts to the men and groups that belonged to these networks. In doing so, women gained control of the *dala* spirit of the dead (by freeing it from social obligations). Their possession of this spirit became a source of women's cultural power, according to Weiner. Therefore, women were crucial to the exchange networks that operated in the male-dominated social domain. They facilitated the regeneration of the exchange networks that were suspended by death with their redistribution ceremonies. They dramatized their economic and cultural power (i.e., production of *dala* spirits and grass skirts) at moments of crisis, such as death, by entering a male domain as producers and distributors of wealth.

In conclusion, Weiner's study revealed the noneconomic aspect of exchange by showing the extent to which it contributed to the creation of social solidarity. Thus, it occurred when social solidarity was most threatened.

But how has Weiner defined **symbolic exchange**?

Unlike western money or commodities, the objects of the Trobriand exchange cannot be detached from a very personalized association of the original owner, even after they have been transferred. In this manner, the objects extend the owner's social, personal, and political influence once they go into circulation as extensions of the self. For example, women incorporated the symbolic elements of the female persona that, in turn, were received by men as recognition of the social power of women.

Weiner asserted that the Trobriands read each other's thoughts by the way in which objects were exchanged. The need and interest of one person in relation to another could be communicated by giving objects.

She identified exchange as a form of **visual communication** that both drew people together and emphasized their separateness. In this sense, exchange networks also emphasized the unstable and temporary character of all social relations that must be constantly renewed by cycles of exchange events.

■

Readings

- Bronislaw Malinowski. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesia*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922.

- Annette Weiner. *Women of Value Men of Renown: New Perspectives on Trobriand Exchange.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976.

Notes

(1) Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942): Polish anthropologist, who greatly influenced the development of British social anthropology. Studied the Trobriand Islands in Melanesia. Professor at Yale University.

(2) Annette Weiner (1933-1997): American cultural anthropologist, best known for her study of the Trobriands, retracing the path of Malinowski almost five decades later. Professor and Dean at New York University.

PART VI:

SIGNS, COMMUNICATION, AND PERFORMANCE

CHAPTER TWELVE

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The previous section dealt with Marcel Mauss' definition of social fact and its application to exchange systems. This section calls our attention to language. **Language is the central social fact of all ethnographic analysis.** Ethnographic analysis takes place in language, and language has been the central tool of an anthropologist as he/she objectifies another society.

The modern concept of language coincided with the Boasian concept of culture. Each language is a system of rules, and the systems of rules that govern languages change from one language to the next.

In the 19th century, people believed that certain languages are superior and more complex than others, and this corresponded to the social complexity of that society. Boas disproved this (as discussed in Chapter 1). By applying the principle of cultural relativism to language, he showed that all languages are equal and competent. The rules of language, like the habitual aspects of culture, are largely unconscious. We deploy these rules spontaneously, without being fully aware of their influence.

Language, like culture, is productive: we create sentences. Language is also receptive: it facilitates our interpretation of the world around us. Language, like culture, is a synthesis of material and ideational forms that cannot be separated from each other.

Linguists speak of **competence or language**, and **performance or speech**, just like anthropologists and historians who distinguish between a surface event and the underlying structures that produce this event: **Competence** is concerned with all the given organizations and rules of a language that a speaker draws on in order to communicate. Language is the conceptual code, the system of (unconscious) knowledge that enables a speaker-listener to produce and understand speech. **Performance** is concerned with the actual mechanisms of communication, which employ only certain, not all, rules in any speech event. Speech is the actual behavior—people making noises. Competence is generalized. Roger

Keesing (1) saw linguistic competence as one component of cultural competence, i.e., tool-making, physical movement—the general repertoire that enables a person to move through and manipulate his/her cultural environment. **If competence is general, performance is particular.** Performance is concerned with how a given cultural code or value is individualized and applied to specific situations. In language, this distinction can be seen as analogous to that between English and the various dialects, or any language, e.g., Greek, and its various dialects.

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In conclusion, language is considered to have five functions in anthropological theory:

- It facilitates: language is a medium that gives us access to a specific community;
- It generates: it enables the production of scientific data;
- It validates: it is a mechanism through which, by dialogue with the informant, we verify aspects of cultural reality. This is important, because one language (that of the informant) is a means of generating data that end up being handled in another language (that of the anthropologist);
- It penetrates: it enables us to understand how particular systems of cognition operate—it gets us in the mind of the other;
- It is foundational, according to those who define culture as a communication system and, thus, advocate that the analysis of different domains, levels, and practices of culture can adopt and borrow the methods deployed in the analysis of language. In this view, culture is a configuration of a multiplicity of languages, employing different signifying media: sound, color, gesture, smell, and vision.

The previous discussion of kinship showed how kinship systems function as a language; they fictionalize actual biological relations in order to function as a language to talk about relations between people who have no biological connection. Boas considered linguistic categories to be analogous to cultural categories, for they are both unconscious phenomena. Yet, they are different, because cultural phenomena, originally unconscious, can be subjected to secondary reasoning and rationalization, but linguistic phenomena are not subjected to reinterpretation.

Readings

- Roger Keesing. "Language and Communication," pp. 76-90. In *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective*. (2nd edition). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981.

Note

(1) Roger Keesing (1935-1993): American linguist and anthropologist. Studied the Kwaio of Malaita in the Solomon Islands (Melanesia). Professor at McGill University (Montreal, Canada) and, previously, at the Australian National University (Canberra).

Linguistic Method in Ethnography

The linguist Edward Sapir (1), Boas' student, moved language to the center of cultural analysis. He perceived a foundational difference between language and culture. Culture in history changes at a faster rate than language and, by doing so, culture is often subjected to conscious interventions and transformations. In contrast, the transformation of language in time is not only a slower process, but also an unconscious one. Language, therefore, is giving access to deeper psychic realities. Language has a more collective social character, because it is beyond the control of any single individual in a speech community. He called this **the slow historical drift** in language.

This thesis was a refinement of Boas' separation of race, language, and culture. Both Boas and Sapir attempted to show that elements of a cultural system, such as language and economy, although interrelated, are autonomous from each other and can exhibit different rates of historical transformation.

For Sapir, culture is what a society does and thinks, whereas language is concerned with how this is done. This division between content (culture) and form (system of communication, language) has been central to anthropology ever since. In other areas besides language, such as gift exchange, it has been central in the analysis of cultural form as something determining and independent from a particular content. For example, Marcel Mauss, as discussed earlier, was more concerned with how things are exchanged and not what is exchanged; the value is not invested in the object of exchange, but in the rules and procedures that place the object in circulation, i.e., giving, receiving, and repaying. Weiner, in turn, was able to analyze gift exchange in the Trobriands as a way of giving and receiving messages, as a system of communication expressive of the self. On the basis of this opposition between content and form, Sapir claimed that passing from one language to another is analogous to passing from one geometrical system of reference to another. The enriching of a portion of space by the introduction of new objects does not affect the geometrical form of that region.

Sapir's thesis, that all languages are inherently adequate and relative to each other, meant that language is a mechanism that takes raw perceptual experience and endows it with particular form—the *form filling of language,* as he called it. All languages are self-contained systems of reference; each language constructs a different world of reference and

object relations that can be studied by the analysis of grammatical, syntactical, and indexical systems. In short, Sapir translated Boas' cultural relativism in terms of language: Each language constructs its own reality and, insofar as the rules of linguistic construction shift from language to language, they shift from culture to culture. **Passing from one language to another is passing from one system of time and space to another, one system of social reality to another.**

Sapir concluded that social reality is unconsciously founded on the linguistic habits of a social group. No two languages, in terms of their formal structure, are sufficiently similar to be able to represent the same reality. The worlds of different linguistic communities are distinct and discontinuous, and they require translation in order to communicate with each other. Social reality and the world, therefore, are not the same for all cultures, with different labels attached to them. It follows that, if languages construct reality, words are not merely mirror images or reflections of things, nor are they mere labels attached to an object. Language constructs the object and its reality and significance for us. This object can also include our own sense of self.

These views came to be known as the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis:** the grammar of each language contains, in a crystallized form, the worldview of a society.

The "worldview thesis" can be traced back to the 19th century, to the work of Von Humboldt (2), who asserted that the unique design of each language encoded a distinct view of the world. The analysis of grammar, insofar as it involves concepts of space, time, identity, and causality, facilitates the interpretation of other ways of life and thought.

Benjamin Whorf (3), in turn, synthesized Von Humboldt's work and Sapir's thesis that linguistic form molds linguistic content. He contrasted the grammatical systems of the Hopi Indians (Native American tribe) (4) and Europeans and asserted that the mechanistic form of thought characteristic of Europe is closely related to the syntax of the European language. For example, the Hopi did not divide time into past, present, and future tenses (nor did they segment nature into space, time, and manner). Time was ongoing and continuous for them. This can be contrasted to our European view of time, which is objectified into the past, present, and future.

Color categories represent another example. The languages of different cultures classify colors in different ways. For example, the Hanunoo of the Philippines (5) demonstrate the ability to perceive all colors that Westerners perceive, but their language only allows for four basic categories: lightness, darkness, wetness, and dryness. These categories alone, or in combination with others, describe the color.

In conclusion, based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the conceptual world can be analyzed through linguistic categories.

■

Readings

- Dell Hymes. “Linguistic Method in Ethnography: Its Development in The United States,” pp. 249-311. In *Method and Theory in Linguistics*. Edited by P.L. Garvin. The Hague: Mouton.

- Edward Sapir. “The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society,” pp. 114-142. In *The Unconscious: A Symposium.* Edited by E. S. Dummer. New York: Knopf, 1929.

Notes

(1) Edward Sapir (1884-1939): American linguist–anthropologist. The most important figure in the early development of the discipline of linguistics. Professor at Yale University and, previously, at the University of Chicago.

(2) Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1767-1835): German philosopher and linguist. Translated Pindar and Aeschylus into German. Influenced Noam Chomsky’s theory of language and Sapir-Whorf’s idea of linguistic relativity.

(3) Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941): American linguist. Lecturer at Yale University.

(4) Hopi: A Native American tribe that lives primarily in northeastern Arizona. As of the 2010 census, there were approximately 19.500 Hopi in the US.

(5) Hanunoo: The approximately 7000 Hanunoo live on Mindoro, a Philippine island. They traditionally write on bamboo in vertical columns from bottom to top, though read from left to right horizontally.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LANGUAGE AND DISORDER: ON APHASIA

For linguists and anthropologists, the linguistic form determines the content of our experience; it provides access to the way meaning is constructed and how objects of meaning are selected. In this case, one way to study form is through the analysis of linguistic disorder, of the breakdown of linguistic structures.

Freud (1) pioneered this approach in his study of word play, puns, and linguistic error, all of which he treated as evidence of the workings of the unconscious mind. This is why Roman Jacobson (2) studied **aphasia,** a disorder that pertains to the disassociation of different brain functions evident in speaking patterns.

Aphasia, as a disease, affects the capacity of **linguistic combination**. In language, smaller linguistic units are combined and recombined to give higher levels of complexity, i.e., words are composed into a sentence. In English, for example, this must follow syntactic rules, such as subject–verb–object. (There are different rules in Greek and other languages.) This exercise in combination must follow a set of rules in every language: the rules of **phonemic** combination (combination of sounds) and **syntactic** combination. These rules always set limits on possible combinations.

In any language, the freedom to combine phonemes or sounds to form words is extremely limited. Combining words into sentences is less constraining. Combining sentences into narratives displays more choice.

A linguistic sign involves two modes of arrangement: combination, the relations of contiguity between sounds and words, and selection, the possibility of substituting one word, meaning, or sentence for another. In this system, each phoneme or word gains its specific value in terms of its context, the other phonemes, or words that constitute its environment (combination). These are relations of contiguity (one next to another) that pertain to the combinational aspect of a communication event. Selection is

concerned with the relations of substitution or degrees of similarity. In this case, the value of one word to another is based on its equivalence to that word. **Combination or contiguity, and selection or similarity are the two principles by which we interpret linguistic events—**for example, the relation of one sign to all other signs with which it appears in a sentence and all other signs that can substitute for this sign.

For Jacobson then, any communication event is determined by two types of codes, one characterized by the internal relations of signs with each other and another characterized by an external relation existing between an addresser and addressee; there is an equivalence of the symbols used that permits communication between them.

Aphasia is a disease that highlights these two functions in a speech act by separating them. Aphasiacs exhibit either a combination disorder, which is an inability to combine words into a sentence or a similarity disorder, which is an inability to substitute one word for another or one phrase for another, whereby the second has an equivalent meaning to the first.

For aphasiacs afflicted with similarity disorder, an isolated word, a word without any contextual position in a sentence, has no meaning, because the person cannot substitute this word, if it is outside a sentence, for a host of other words that mean the same thing.

This disorder, thus, reveals a great deal about how meaning is constructed, whether we are concerned with the positioning of words in a sentence or the positioning of a physical gesture that precedes or comes after it.

Part of the meaning of any word or sentence is not defined by its relation to an external nonlinguistic object, but rather, by its positional arrangement in relation to other words or sentences. In this, we see the formal structure of language, molding and determining the content of what is said.

Jacobson presented the following examples: A patient cannot say the word *knife* by itself, but describes it as a pencil sharpener, bread knife, knife and fork: "…the word knife was changed from a free form, capable of occurring alone, into a bound form" (Jacobson 1977, p. 438). Another patient cannot talk of his apartment as a totality, but only as "a good apartment, entrance hall, bedroom, kitchen." The apartment as a totality is described only as a combination of its parts. Another patient cannot place a name on an object, but only as its combined function: "to write."

This disorder extends to the substitution of words or objects that are usually grouped together by each other. Thus, *fork* is a substitute for *knife*, *table* for *lamp*, *smoke* for *pipe*, and so on. The part substitutes for the whole or the whole for the part.

Jacobson concluded that a substitution disorder indicates the patient's inability to metaphorize, to replace one word or image by another in order to express the same meaning. **Metaphor is defined as the transference of meaning from one term to another with which it is associated.**

Thus, per Jacobson, language is organized around two poles: **metaphor,** the substitution or replacement of one meaning by another, and **metonymy,** the contextual relation or positioning of one sign in relation to others**.** In normal speech, these two processes are fused.

For those with a similarity disorder, the relation of metonymy becomes metaphorical. Thus, the part can stand as the whole and acquires the same meaning (Jacobson 1977, p. 440). In combination disorder, the inability to organize simple linguistic elements into complex linguistic elements means that metaphorical categories predominate. To say that something *is* is to say that *it is like* something else.

■

Anthropologists began to analyze whole sentences of linguistic and behavioral action in terms of these two poles: the **paradigmatic order** and **the syntagmatic order**. A **syntagm** is a linear sequence of words forming a sentence, such as a subject–verb–object. All of the terms that can fit into that syntagmatic relation are the paradigmatic order. The paradigmatic order corresponds to the basic social values that govern a cultural system and to the multiple symbols that encode or express these values. The syntagmatic order corresponds to those sequences of action spoken, or otherwise actualizes or activates the paradigmatic order of values. Any sequence or performance will, thus, juxtapose one social value against an action. Consequently, the meaning of any one act or statement is determined by its relation to other acts or statements made by the social actor. Also, all these combinations of speech and action are metaphorical, that is, expressing or symbolizing unspoken and often invisible value orientations. In this manner, both speech and gesture are symbolic media that are organized by formal relations independent of the specific content. We see here how linguistic analysis moves into sociological analysis. The distinction between metonymy and metaphor, or contiguity and substitution

accounts for the cross-cultural situation in which the same sequence of gestures or language can mean completely different things, depending on the metaphorical, paradigmatic, and normative context.

In conclusion, Jacobson sought to analyze the construction of meaning by analyzing the metaphorical and metonymic operations that can organize the imagery of any sign system: a poem, a novel, or a painting.

He concluded his study by showing how the principles of metonymy and metaphor operate in Freud's analysis of dream symbolism. An example of a metonymic displacement, as Freud calls it, would be "This is the chair my mother sat in," she was in contact with. "I love my mother"; therefore, "I love this chair."

Anthropologists have identified similar principles in magic rituals. For example, in sympathetic magic, objects that share a visual similarity can have affective influence on each other, e.g., dolls resembling particular persons; also, the contact of a person with a stigmatized object, such as a Muslim eating pork, can pollute the person. (This would be a metonymic event.)

■

Readings

- Roman Jacobson: "On Aphasia," pp. 432-447. In *Symbolic Anthropology: A Reader in Symbols and Meaning.* Edited by Janet Dolgin, David Kemnitzer, David Schneider. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

Notes

(1) Sigmund Freud (1856-1939): Austrian neurologist. Known as the founder of psychoanalysis and the clinical method for treating psychological problems through dialogue between patient and psychologist. Lived and worked in Vienna. Left Austria in 1938 to escape the Nazis. Died in exile in the United Kingdom.

(2) Roman Jacobson (1896-1982): Russian-American linguist and literary theorist. Professor at Harvard University and, previously, at The New School for Social Research (New York).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

VERBAL ART AS PERFORMANCE

The approaches of Whorf and Jacobson, discussed in the previous two chapters, emphasized **competence**, the formal structure of language—the relation between different elements of language.

Another school of thought, **sociolinguistics,** focused instead on **performance**—how language is used in everyday practice. One of the first sociolinguists was Dell Hymes who applied and extended Jacobson's arguments concerning the multifunctionality of language and contributed to pioneer the connection between speech and social relations. He focused on the poetic structures within speech and promoted ethnopoetics, the method of transcribing and analyzing oral narrative, which reveals indigenous artistic forms. (See also Chapter 4).

Richard Bauman (1) (1975), in turn, adopted the sociolinguistic perspective and centered on *how* meaning is created through action and through the communication exchanged between an actor and an audience. He defined the **speech event** as a type of action that organizes speaker and audience into a social relation or structure.

This definition unites the recitation of myths, oral poetry, musical performances, and the aesthetic domain with everyday, commonplace communication speech. In this case, speech events are analyzed as miniature stages or theaters. The way these are organized—i.e., the form of the speech event—is given priority over the content. Bauman concretely focused on how the media for presenting different content determine the meaning of that content. His goal was to move away from text-centered approaches that focus on content. He detected a contradiction between these approaches and oral performance. In the latter, the text or content is only one component among others of the total communicative event, which can include nonlinguistic sounds and body gestures (that is, modes of performance).

Performative genres, then, attempt to structure and influence how an audience interprets what is being said. This is a metonymic process in

which language is contextualized in extra-linguistic modes of communication and gains its meaning from this positioning. This is a movement away from the literal meaning of *what* is said; it implies that a metaphorical signification is taking place. In this sense, **Bauman translated Jacobson's categories from text to action.**

Following Erving Goffman (2), Bauman asserted that performance genres frame communication events and attempt to control the collective interpretation of these events. This means that we translate our speech even as we speak it. He further claimed that metaphorical theatrical genres of communication are limited to specific artistic disciplines, but can be located in everyday social interactions. Thus, performance studies attempt to decenter the literal character of social life (that is, things appear the way they are and can be nothing else). In this context, symbolic communication is not reserved for ritual, drama, or artistic communication, but constitutes the basic fabric of social life.

Social encounters, then, involve the construction, destruction, concordance, and conflict of various interpretive frames within which people present their speech and acts. The basic social structure in this case is between an actor and the audience and is governed by rules of competence. In other words, the communicator assumes a relation of responsibility to an audience by communicating in languages or sign systems that they collectively share.

This implies that the audience will not only evaluate a speech act by what is said, but by **how** it is said.

One example of this is the effect that class distinctions, social rankings, and public and private spaces exert on the use of formal and informal speech in various societies. The audience, or the actor and the place where a communication event occurs will structure how the message is presented. In turn, the actor will show his/her awareness of the identity of audience and the location of the event by the communication genres and techniques deployed in giving the message. All this is a display of competence.

Some societies explicitly categorize the type of speech that is appropriate in different social situations—e.g., the use of Black English in the US, or street language versus formal English in school. In this case, speech is defined as a cultural system that can vary from community to community, and within a community, from social situation to social situation, gender to

gender, and class to class. Thus, the **formal structure and organization of speech competence provide access to social divisions in society. This refers to a politics of speech.**

■

A most important concept in performance studies is that of **metacommunication** or **keying.** It refers to a range of implicit or explicit messages that carry instructions regarding how to interpret what is being communicated. This framing is termed metacommunication, because it is communication about communication.

Metacommunication is culturally organized, as is any other speech act. However, it is not visible. Since its function is to foreground the intended meaning of a given message, metacommunication devices themselves often remain in the background, as part of the context within which the text is presented. Examples that Bauman lists (1977, p. 295) include conventional openings and closings; explicit statements announcing or asserting performance; figurative language, such as metaphor and metonymy; and an appeal to tradition.

These formal patterns of metacommunication determine or influence our forms of participation in a speech event. Since they are commonly shared cultural codes, their deployment of one speaker involves the collaborative construction of the communication event by the speaker and the audience. This is defined as **co-narration**.

Bauman defined the structure of performance as the interplay between setting, act sequence, cultural rules of communication, and social roles. He pointed out that when a person assumes a particular performative role, such as that of a storyteller or joker, that person is, in fact, attempting to distance himself/herself from other roles he/she plays in society. So, the identity of the individual can shift as he/she shifts performative genres. Keying devices are crucial here, because they signal that a person is shifting from one role to another, from a nonperformative to a performative role. The phrase *once upon a time* is a traditional keying device for signaling the difference between storytelling and everyday modes of speech. Repetition, changing pitch tones, and speed are all keying devices.

A performance can be divided into styles of narration and classes of narratives:

- The event that is taking place, e.g., a marriage rite;
- The communicative act, such as singing, speaking, and physical gestures;
- The role, i.e., who is the actor and who is the audience;
- The applied genre of communication, such as prose, poetry, sacred or secular language, oral or written work, joking, oath-swearing, and mimicry.

The same performances or performance content can be repositioned in different frames. For example, they can move from being serious to joking, from literal to ironic. Thus, conventional styles of performance are subjected to creative manipulation and deformation through the deployment of metacommunicative devices. Political conflict and social change can be expressed in the transformation, repositioning, satirizing, and destruction of conventional communication genres. Social conflict can also be expressed in the transgression of roles that are associated with particular communicative styles. (See also Carnival in Chapter 23.)

In conclusion, Bauman was concerned with the **emergent aspect of performance.** Performance appears from the background or context that it transforms. He, thus, connected performative modes with social change and transformation. For that reason, they are useful in expressing social conflict.

Certain performances can produce a unique social structure or social relation between actors and audience, which diverges from their customary social interactions. Performances separate social actors from previous social contexts. They depend on the creation of special spaces and times. The fact that they are limited in time and space also points to their disjuncture from conventional social interactions. When performances come into conflict with everyday communication events, conflicts about the rules of performance (what can or cannot be said) can also arise.

In conclusion, for Bauman, emergent performances that separate themselves from prevailing social contexts are metacommunicative events that seek to comment on, critique, challenge, and transform conventional communicative contexts. He defined these events as a form of social organization, that is, a systematic ordering of social relations by acts of choice and decision. He distinguished them from social structure, which he defined as the ideal and abstract conceptions of the patterns of group relations.

An example of this was already encountered in New Guinea (Chapter 11): descent relations and social structure versus relations of shared substance and exchange—the latter being a performatively defined social organization, since people allocated social roles in terms of an act of exchange. Thus, local men, by telling Malinowski that descent relations are dominant in the Trobriands, gave him the ideal social structure. In contrast, Weiner observed performances and saw the dominance of exchange on which descent relations depended. This difference between Malinowski and Weiner enabled the latter to re-evaluate the relation of gender on the island.

New performances are techniques by which people express themselves and accommodate to social change.

■

Readings

- Richard Bauman. "Verbal Art as Performance," pp. 290-31. In *American Anthropologist*, 77(2), 1975.

Notes

(1) Richard Bauman: American anthropologist and folklorist. Professor at Indiana University.

(2) Erving Goffman (1922-1982): Influential Canadian-American sociologist. Known for his emphasis on the micrological, on everyday life, as opposed to the macrological, that is, the macro-sociology of social structures. Professor at the University of Pennsylvania and, previously, at the University of California (Berkeley).

PART VII:

COGNITIVE SYSTEMS: SPACE AND TIME

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SPACE

In the preceding chapters, the discussion focused on biology or nature as culturally relative—although they are usually perceived as fixed, unchanging, static, and independent of human intervention. Similarly, it was shown, in relation to language, that this relativism is not a matter of putting different labels on the same universal experience, but that experiences are different, as are their classifications. The form of language, therefore, structures how we see and perceive the world.

We often don't examine language and biology or nature; indeed, we take them for granted. This also applies to the pragmatic and material dimension of doing. We move and act in the dimensions of time and space that we take for granted. This is because they are the conditions upon which all thinking, representing, and acting depend. If we began to seriously question our operational concepts of space and time, we would probably be incapable of any action.

Space and time are also culturally constructed. When categories of space and time change for entire collectivities, two things can be observed. Their transformation causes changes in all other aspects of social life, because the concepts of space and time are fundamental institutions of everyday life. Reciprocally, changes of great magnitude in other domains of social life, e.g., ecological changes, wars, and political revolutions, will be expressed in terms of the transformations of space and time.

Right and Left

In an important study entitled "Epaminondas The Pythagorean, Or The Tactical Problem of Right and Left," the French historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1) (1998) adopted the ethnographic perspective to examine changes in the thinking and classification of space in ancient Greek society and how these changes influenced a central institution of that society, warfare.

Vidal-Naquet examined warfare in order to measure changes in conceptual frameworks because warfare is part of the domain of action, of doing things in space and manipulating space to achieve certain goals. His aim was to show that the ritual–religious conceptions of sacred space versus secular space, pure versus impure, or good versus bad space automatically limited the types of movement in space and the strategies of spatial manipulation that the Greeks thought were possible.

Transformation in the concept of space implies transformation of the nature and character of strategic action that takes place in space. Vidal-Naquet demonstrated that both concepts of space, the religious and the geometric that historically replaced the religious, made certain orientations in space possible and prevented others from happening.

Although the transition from religious to a geometric-mathematical conception opened new possibilities of action, a price was paid. Geometric space is neutral space and runs counter to any kind of emotional, personal, or subjective identification. The following study by Jean Franco highlights how important this affective relation to space is.

Vidal-Naquet's ingenious analysis deserves our attention: He chose to examine a small change in one particular domain of social practice, military strategy, and demonstrated how this microcosmic change in fact reflected a total revolution in Greek thought. He looked at a battle that took place in 371 BC, between the Thebans (fighting together with the Athenians) and Spartans (fighting with the Mantineans). The Thebans, led by Epaminondas, won because they attacked the Spartans from the left wing of their battle line. This way, the enemy was outflanked.

What is so special about this? Outflanking your enemy from the left or right side is a common tactic, whether one is fighting a battle, playing a football game, or running a race. It is done all the time. In response, Vidal-Naquet quoted the deployment of the left wing at this point in history as a true revolution in tactics and break with tradition. The Thebans and

Athenians won because none had ever led a battle with the left side before. Thus, they caught the enemy by surprise; the enemy had no tactics to counter the advance.

This, therefore, was a military issue only on the surface. It actually revealed something about the cultural construction of space. For Vidal-Naquet, the issue was not whether the Greeks fought on the left, but that, until that time, the Greeks had not committed any action or gesture that would make the left side more prominent than the right side.

Here, the left–right notion, applied to an army, can be understood as a metaphor based on the human body. Any action by the army in space was based on the movements of **the human body in space**. From battle tactics, therefore, we are back to the concept of nature and the body. One small element in a society links us with an entire range of concepts and material relations.

We are told that the Spartans held the right wing, for the battle took place in their territory. Thus, home and the right side are associated. The alien, the outsider, is linked to the left side. This arrangement of inside–home being linked to the right and outside–alien being linked to the left was perceived as natural and the only way to fight a battle. Furthermore, the soldiers never exposed the left side of their body, because it was the most vulnerable side—there, they would get wounded. By contrast, the right side of the body is the aggressive side, the one that attacks.

Ancient commentators like Thucydides attempted to give a technical, rational explanation for the emphasis on the right side of the body and its role in military maneuvers. But Vidal-Naquet claimed we must look for a sociological and symbolic explanation. He pointed to an almost universal social fact that the left is associated with the profane, with evil, while the right is associated with the sacred and the beneficial. This binary division applies to the cultural construction of both the human body and space. He called this construction an **asymmetrical representation of body and space.**

This conception of the body and space is a religious one. In ancient Greece, the right is the sign of active strength and life; the left is a sign of passive weakness and death. The right is life-giving and beneficial, whereas the left emanates harmful forces. The entire cosmos was, thus, divided between left and right and other paired qualities, such as good and evil, and equal and unequal. The sky was considered to be a body that had

a right and left side. All that was good was in the upper right, high and front. All that was bad was in the lower left, down and back. The right eye and right breast were thought to be stronger than the left ones, and a connection was made between a male fetus and the right breast. Upon entering sacred spaces, as well as one's own home, Greeks were supposed to cross the threshold leading with one's right foot. This still holds today. (People say "with the right" and step with the right foot when visiting someone's house.) At the crossroad to the Underworld, Hades, the right road led to the Elysian Fields, where the dead feast for eternity, whereas the left road led to Tartarus, where the weak were punished. The right/left was also expressed as gender categories. The conception of a boy took place in the right side of the uterus, whereas the conception of a girl occurred in the left side.

■

If the left/right dichotomy was considered to be the natural order of the world, in which the right side is the active strength, what could motivate Epaminondas to use the left side? In other words, what social–scientific changes would account for the Theban–Athenians' advance on the enemy with the left side?

The first change was in the conception of the natural world, which came from the sciences that specialized in the study of the body and space, such as anatomy and geometry, respectively. The dissection of corpses and the drawings from these studies proved no asymmetrical structure of the body. The body was revealed to be symmetrical, which led Plato to also conclude that the preference of the right side over the left side was merely a matter of social training.

The second change came from geometry, which completely overturned the religious conception of space. It neutralized space in terms of the moral qualities that religious belief ascribed to it. The Pythagoreans, the leading geometers of that time, who had previously advocated a right/left division of the cosmos, now asserted that the geometric space was homogeneous, identical, and similar; it displayed no intrinsic division, except that which is imposed by geometric forms—all of which reflected the natural ordering of the world. Thus, instead of a right/left definition of the cosmos, the **Pythagoreans advocated a centric model**: cosmos is not a duality, but a unity. It emerges from a specific center that is equally distant from all other parts and components of the cosmos. In short, all parts are equal. Thus, high/low and left/right was relativized.

The symmetrical construction of space and body meant that the conception of the body was subordinated to geometrical space. This implies that there was no moral difference between the right and left side. All movement occurred in geometrical space.

Conclusively, **the battle where the Thebans defeated the Spartans was much more than a case of contrasting technical military strategies. It expressed a wide-ranging cultural conflict between two conceptions of space, the body and the cosmos.**

This conflict was symbolized by the egalitarian politics of Athens: all citizens of the Polis were equally distant from the center, the Agora, where all political decisions were made. This contrasted with the asymmetric society of the Spartans, which was organized into aristocrats, serfs, and slaves.

■

Readings

- Pierre Vidal-Naquet. “Epaminondas the Pythagorean, or the Tactical Problem of Right and Left,” pp. 61-82. In *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World.* Translated by Andrew Szegedy-Maszak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. French publication: «Épaminondas pythagoricien ou le problème tactique de la droite et la gauche,” pp. 95-114. In *Le chasseur noir. Formes de pensées et formes de société dans le monde grec*. Paris: Maspero, 1983 (2nd edition).

Note

(1) Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1930-2006): Renowned French historian, specializing in Ancient Greece. Professor at École des Haute Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), France.

Gendering Space

Space in ancient Greece, as discussed in the previous chapter, was morally divided into *left and right*, *up and down.* In contemporary **Latin America**, according to the historian and literary critic Jean Franco (1) (1985), space has been divided between *inside and outside*.

In Latin America, like in Greece, this moral dichotomy is expressed in terms of gender imagery. The inside is identified with femininity, whereas the outside is identified with the masculinity. Per Franco, this gender division applies to different spaces in the society: private home, church, monastery, school, and Indian reservation. All these interiors have been perceived to be feminine. They have also served to classify the groups of people associated with these spaces, such as the family, mothers, priests, nuns, children, and Indians. Politics takes place in the outside, and as such, is a masculine activity. Similarly, the army and the state are masculine and associated with the public domain.

Thus, **the cultural construction of space is linked to the cultural construction of violence.** Just as Vidal-Naquet examined the micropractice of warfare to demonstrate a change in the spatial imagery of the cosmos, Jean Franco showed how the changing patterns of warfare are reflected in the changing relation of inside/outside, public/private, and masculine/feminine.

Latin American countries are known for their unstable central governments and frequent violent revolutions. The public sphere is always one of conflict and instability in which legal and political systems have contested legitimacy. Franco asserted that, in response to the instability and violence of the public domain, Latin cultures developed specific feminized refuge areas of stable social relations that counterbalanced the masculine domain of public violence. She named this *topophilia*, love of place, and considered spaces like church and home to be sanctuaries. Figures, like the priests and women associated with these spaces, were supposedly immune from public violence.

In this analysis, one detects divisions between the inside/outside, public/private, family/state, and sacred/secular. In fact, one finds the same divisions between kinship/religion and the public space that was encountered in David Schneider's study earlier. One also sees the same opposition between asymmetrical social relations and spaces that were discussed in Vidal-Naquet's case.

At the same time, these spaces of refuge were not apolitical. Franco stated that, because of the instability of central state governments, these refuge places functioned as mini-states that preserved and passed on the tradition of political resistance and reciprocity based on egalitarian religious notions or the bonds of kinship. These social structures could be contrasted with the competitive, individualistic, and violent social relations of the public domain.

These refuge spaces were dangerous to the repressive totalitarian states, because they harbored utopian values of reciprocity, equality, Christian brotherhood, and even alternative cultural forms, as in the case of Indian reservations, which could be expanded and mapped into the society at large. Franco described these spaces as **spaces of feminine power**. Even though these spaces appeared outwardly and from the point of view of the state, men, and the public domain as subordinate, passive, and powerless, they were all the more subversive, because of the covert power and ideologies they perpetuated.

These spaces became destabilized with the modernization of the economy, which forced women, children, and Indians into the labor force of the public domain. They were further destabilized with the modernization of warfare, by which the state increasingly intruded into the private domain as a domain of political resistance, in order to incorporate new categories of victims and to expand its power and domination. Franco identified the destruction of these spaces by state violence and the killing of priests, nuns, women, and children as a shift **from territorialization to deterritorialization.**

> The murder of three American nuns in el Salvador in December 1980, the murder of priests in Brazil and Argentina, the torture of pregnant women in Uruguay, the farming out of "terrorists" children to military families in the southern cone, the admonitory raping of women in front of their families in several Latin American countries, the Mexican army's attack on unarmed male and female students in Tlatelolco in 1968, the recent kidnapping in broad daylight of a well-known writer, university teacher and feminist, Alaide Foppa in Guatemala, the dislodging of Indian communities from traditional lands, plus countless other incidents, all appear more and more to be the well-thought-out atrocities of a concerted offensive. It is part of a war that has pitted unequal forces against one another—on the one hand, the overarmed military who have become instruments of the latest stage of capitalist development

> and, on the other, not only the left but also certain traditional institutions, the Indian community, the family, and the Church (which still provides sanctuary and refuge for resistance). These institutions owe their effectiveness as refuges to historically based moral rights and traditions, rather like the immunities which (before the recent attack on the Spanish embassy in Guatemala) had accrued to diplomatic space. Homes were, of course, never immune from entry and search, but until recently, it was generally males who were rounded up and taken away, often leaving women to carry on and even transmit resistance from one generation to another. Families, thus, inherited opposition, as others inherited positions in the government and bureaucracy.
>
> But what is now at stake is the assault on such formerly immune territories…." (Franco 1985, p. 414)

The invasion of these spaces by the state was a violent appropriation of the concrete experiential values of motherhood, family, femininity, domestic purity, and religious solidarity. The abstract ideologies of *topophilia* and religious solidarity, advanced by the state in correlation with the violation and destruction of their experiential and social frameworks, was called **deterritorialization** by Franco. It is defined as a process in which these experiential realities are emptied of concrete meanings, abstracted from their local context, and then deployed as utopian norms and rhetoric by the state. This emptying of meaning is symbolized by the disassociation of these values from their customary spaces.

In conclusion, this study revealed how the division of space into secular/sacred areas in the particular context attempted to preserve certain social possibilities. This can be contrasted to the sacred/secular division that limited such possibilities in another context, as revealed in Vidal-Naquet's study.

■

The fact that a male/female iconography is used to represent space demonstrates the extent to which space has been perceived in terms of gender characteristics and, furthermore, the extent to which genders have defined their separate identities and relations in terms of spatial arrangements.

Along these lines, Jean-Pierre Vernant (2) (2008) discussed the anomalous position of the Gods *Hestia* and *Hermes*, paired in antiquity. He demonstrated

that Greeks had two concepts of social space: one that was stable, positioned, and local, and the other, which was transitional, unstable, heterogeneous, and conflictual. These qualities of space have been seen in terms of male/female attributes. However, both men and women pass back and forth between these spaces.

Recalling Du Boulay and her study in modern Greece (to be further discussed in Chapter 21), there is an inversion of these binary oppositions. But what Du Boulay meant by inversion is that the negative side of the opposition often received a positive value (e.g., there is a positive value to the left hand in special situations). The division, however, remained. In contrast, Vernant indicated that, when it comes to space, women switched their classification in some circumstances. This does not mean that the space with which they associated changes value, but rather that they themselves move from the left side to the right side. Therefore, there is no one-to-one correspondence between women and space (left). Gender attributes change—consider, for example, the feminization of space or men.

As Vernant highlighted, *Hestia* symbolized the home and hearth, but also the connection between home and earth, that is, the sedentary, the stable, and the structured space. *Hermes*, on the contrary, symbolized movement, flow, mutation, transition, and contact between foreign elements. He was linked to the threshold, the door, the Gate, and likewise, to the tombs, the crossroads, and the boundaries of towns, cities, and states, where the inside passes into the outside. He was also linked to the *agora,* the public space, and to the transition from private to public space. In short, *Hestia* centered space, and *Hermes* mobilized it.

When we talk of space in Greek culture, we also talk of movement. The organization of space is tied to the organization of practice, action, and agency. Different spaces organize different forms of agency. Vernant related the strong connection between the (en)gendering of the person and spatial qualities to exogamous marriage. Through the initiation rite of marriage, the girl became a woman. This was marked by her separation from the natal household and entrance into the husband's household. Thus, the acquisition of womanhood was expressed in the transition of space.

He also associated this spatial movement to ritual gift-giving and exchange. Marriage was the giving of a woman as a gift to the man (Vernant 2006, pp. 132-33), which was meant to shield alliances. In this sense, women were like commodities of a special type and, therefore,

mobile. In this sense, they took on the characteristics of the nonsedentary domain, usually linked with men. In turn, a man who received a woman in marriage represented the landed property of his family and, by extension, the continuity of generations within that family. The male figure now represented the stable, the interior, and the private, in contrast to the female who, as an item of exchange, was a politicized component of the public space. In this case, a depoliticization of gender relations occurred within the domestic space, and this space now took on a new significance. Political practice remained on the outside, and the domestic space was sequestered from political relations. The removal of the concept of power from the domestic sphere must be seen as an ideological intervention that tended to neutralize relations that could be dangerously political. This issue will be met again in Eric Wolf's study (in Chapter 21)—not in relation to the *agora*, but in relation to the state, because Wolf studied a different era.

Vernant used further examples from Greek tragedy to show that these binary relations were not essentialized. Men could take on feminine attributes, and women could take on male attributes in particular situations and spaces. In the example of *Orestes* and *Clytemnestra*—which is about how political violence penetrates the domestic space and the familial social structure—the prevalent imagery is that of inversion: men are characterized as feminine and women as masculine in the drama. Once the political/nonpolitical value that organizes the relation of the domestic to public space was transgressed, the domestic space was politicized. This transgression was symbolized by the inversion of gender roles and relations.

Thus, gender imagery predominated in political representation when the political process moved beyond and exceeded the spaces of proper political practice, the public arenas of the Polis. We will encounter this theme again in the following study by Kosseleck, in the political relation between the Hellenes and Barbarians.

Furthermore, Vernant revealed that the exchange cycles in marriage, which deployed gendered concepts of space, could also be found in the guest/host relations that built alliances between domestic groups. They were also symbolized as relations of inside/outside and open/closed space.

The categories of open and closed space echo Michael Herzfeld's (3) notion of display and concealment in modern Greece (Herzfeld 1986). According to Herzfeld, modern Greeks in some situations assume the

Hellenic identity, and in other situations, they assume the *Romeic* identity; the former deals with external relations and status, whereas the latter is inward-facing and concerns intimacy and egalitarianism. People play with the tension between the two poles, which are also boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, concealment and display. Concealment relates to women, and display relates to men. These are performative categories; therefore, they become inverted in different situations. Thus, Herzfeld moved away from essentialism and nominalism—it is not the male/female, but the inside/outside category that extends to concealment and display. Furthermore, Herzfeld (also discussed in Chapter 20) confirmed the political character of gender categories and the Greeks' capability to apply these categories to novel political situations. In this sense, he undermined the static cosmological and ahistorical representations of gender that had been imposed earlier by Du Boulay and others.

In turn, Herzfeld identified the origins of this concept of display and concealment with the emergence of the western state and linked it to 19th century Greek nationalism. Yet, Vernant showed that this logic as gendered category has a much older lineage. His study suggested that the open/closed spatial dichotomy, with its gendered inflections, was a mode of resistance to state penetration that pitted the local and the regional against the national.

■

The fact that the structuration of space determines people's behavior in modern societies has been discussed by a number of theorists. For example, the sociologist Erving Goffman, in his influential book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990) discussed the front-and-back regions of everyday modern urban life with regard to spatially arranged performances. The self is the collection of those performances that take place in and across specific spaces. Thus, the self is revealed as plural.

On the other hand, several anthropologists have focused on what is considered back space in society. For example, in the Greek context, Seremetakis (2016) has focused on cemeteries in rural and urban scapes in this era of socioeconomic crisis. In the same spirit of analyzing the effects of modernity and globalization, the sociologist Anthony Giddens (4) (1990) explored "space and time compression" in global space and attributed the resulting reconception of space and society to global mobility and control strategies. Historians, in turn, have attributed the

reconstitution of space and society in modernity to new communication technologies.

In conclusion, and as geographer Nigel Thrift (5) would agree, space, just like society and nature, is not a common-sense external background to human and social action.

■

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- Jean-Pierre Vernant. “Hestia Hermes: The Religious Expression of Space and Movement in Ancient Greece,” pp. 157-197. In *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks.* New York: Zone Books, 2006. (First published by MIT Press, 1965).

Notes

(1) Jean Franco: Renowned British-born literary critic and historian, specializing in Latin-American literature and culture. Professor at Columbia University (New York) and, previously, at the University of Essex (London).

(2) Jean Pierre Vernant (1914-2007): Renowned French historian and anthropologist, specializing in Ancient Greece, particularly, myth and tragedy. Professor at the University of Sao Paulo (Brazil). Previously, professor at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and honorary professor at the Collège de France.

(3) Michael Herzfeld: Cultural anthropologist, known for his ethnographic work on Crete. Professor at Harvard University and, previously, at Indiana University.

(4) Anthony Giddens: British sociologist, known for his critique of postmodernity and his holistic view of modern societies. Professor of sociology and Director of the London School of Economics

(5) Nigel Thrift: British academic and geographer, leading in the field of human geography. Professor and vice-chancellor at the University of Warwick (England).

Space and Body

In his foundational work on social values, which are grounded in the human body, Robert Hertz (1) stated: *"*Left/right, feminism, racism are concerned with natural inferiority" (1960, p. 89). Hertz was concerned with the cultural construction of the body and, specifically, the division of the body into gendered terrains: the category of left and right, which is analogous to both gender and racial difference. It is no coincidence that he linked the issue of left/right to feminism on the first page of his chapter "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand."

Hertz set out to show how biological difference, such as the position of the hands, the color of the skin, and sexual diamorphism, are reorganized on the level of culture and reduced to a binary logic, for there is nothing to support the claim that binary codes are the only mechanism for representing or expressing difference. Thus, the binary code must be seen as a reduction of difference into a discrete conceptual framework.

For Hertz, who was influenced by Durkheim and Kant, the relation of gender, the body, and biology was an issue of classification, concerned with the rules of thought: how our mental apparatus organizes the material world. In this study, he traced all arguments of the period that attempted to assign an organic causality to the preeminence of the right hand. He used animal ethology that shows that animals are ambidextrous (they use both hands) to argue that there is no anatomical foundation of a right/left difference. Causality, thus, must be attributed to outside forces that shape the individual (meaning through socialization). In this sense, he injected a political factor or element into the construction of difference, whether it pertained to right and left or to man and woman.

"Despite the forcible and sometimes cruel pressure which society exerts on left-handed children in their childhood, they retain all their lives a distinctive preference for the use of the left hand" (Hertz 1960, p. 91). The issue, therefore, of right/left is an issue of cultural selection and classification, which is often institutionalized through violence, force, and discipline. For Hertz, **asymmetry is a political construct.**

Hertz was interested in how political practices, such as discipline, elaborate fictions from biological differences within a culture. Even where there is an element of biological preference for one hand or another, it is obvious that cultural interventions exaggerate this difference by training and exercising one hand, the right hand, while "the left hand is repressed

and kept inactive" (Hertz 1960, p. 92). For example, one of the signs that distinguished a well-brought-up child in India was that its left hand became incapable of any independent action. This bodily mutilation, caused by binding the left hand, points to the intimate connection of the body and violence. The fact that this discipline was applied to children implies that the social sculpting of the body is concerned with the production of social subjects by socialization or acculturation.

Here, the distinction between cultural norms of the body and individual biological differences expresses a classic Durkheimian distinction between the collective and the individual. It is true that many societies attribute the right/left asymmetry to biological or natural causes. Hertz, instead, showed that it is a cultural causality that produces this pattern. Also, the cultural intervention onto the body is, in effect, antagonistic and hostile to the given biological structure of the individual. The human body itself becomes a terrain in which the structures of power and domination and the structures of subordination or subjugation are mapped out. The division of left and right, as inscribed onto the human body, replicates the political, cosmological, and religious conceptions of the social order. The body functions as a walking cartography of the political relations in the particular society.

One of the functions of culture is to create a categorical difference (e.g., left/right), and in turn, to institutionalize it by endowing it with values by means of the division between the sacred and the profane. The division between right and left also becomes the division between pure and impure. The relations between the two are organized in terms of contact and separation. Impurity is a material contact between beings and entities that should remain separate (their contiguity causes pollution, as discussed in Chapter 20). Purity is a condition of maintaining separation. Hertz traced this dualistic logic to the social organization of primitive cultures, specifically to the concept of **moiety**, in which two groups within a single community are reciprocally opposed as sacred and profane, pure and impure, right and left. The notion of moiety, where each side is dependent on the other by virtue of its oppositional characteristics, has been a powerful metaphor for gender relations in many cultures. (It also echoes Cavafy's poem, discussed earlier.)

Hertz de-essentialized the categories of male and female by showing that they are susceptible to transposition from micro- to macrocosm. Before they are even assigned to specific biological markers, they are assigned to nonbiological entities, like the social space. He further showed that the

system of right/left deals with two systems of knowledge, or cognitive separation. "It is a vital necessity that neither of the two hands should know what the other does" (Hertz 1960, p. 98). Applied to gender relations, this is an argument for cognitive separatism, separate systems of knowledge, and codifications of experience.

Finally, the body is mapped out as a hierarchy, as a representation of social stratification and social roles. The lower body functions are assigned to the left hand (e.g., defecation), while the right hand deals with eating, signaling, and grooming. The fact that men allocate to themselves the administration of political order and women traditionally take care of life-cycle rituals, such as death, expresses a right/left dichotomization.

Both individuals and entire communities enter into left hand conditions (e.g., mourning) in their lifetime. Thus, the social order can undergo an inversion from right to left. The very fact that the relation is asymmetrical—therefore, political—means that it is unstable.

■

Hertz, in his study on concepts of the body and cosmology, analyzed the functions of asymmetry synchronically. Reinhart Kosseleck (2), on the other hand, was interested in the function of asymmetric concepts over time.

For Kosseleck, **asymmetric concepts in the diachronic perspective are explicitly political concepts that have religious, aesthetic, behavioral, and cultural effects.**

Concepts, names, or labels that deny recognition or reciprocity between the addresser and addressee and use language to inhibit communication are asymmetric classifications. These classifications establish boundaries between groups. Whether a collectivity is organized on contractual, command, or kinship relations, a political agency is formed or constituted by concepts that circumscribe the group, while excluding others.

Asymmetric concepts are an inherent linguistic code in all political relations. Their presence in linguistic usage indicates political relations, even if there is no official recognition of the political character of the discourse.

Kosseleck intended to show how this asymmetric mode of classification remains stable, while its content shifts in Western history. In other words, he demonstrated that asymmetric logic is institutionalized by one political order and then borrowed by a subsequent hegemony for purposes of legitimation, even if the borrowing entails a transformation in content. He was, therefore, concerned with the formal structures of legitimacy; he detached legitimation processes from any specific political content and focused on the mode of legitimation—the *how*. These modes are not natural, but rather, institutionalized over long periods. Their intrinsic customary character is borrowed or exploited for institutionalizing novel political content.

Kosseleck focused on binary polarities, because he wanted to make a distinction between history and its conceptualization. Concretely, he showed that historical experience and the extent to which we use concepts to represent historical process and relations do not coincide.

In this sense, Kosseleck's historical perspective can also function as an implicit critique of the binary symmetry in the Greek ethnography of the time—a critique of Du Boulay, Dubisch, and Friedl, and their "appearance and reality" concept in particular (see Chapter 20). As Kosseleck pointed out, the issue is not formal ideology and informal behavior, but rather, the radical disjuncture between a historical experience and the available concepts to represent it.

Following Raymond Williams (3), Kosseleck distinguished between residual and emergent culture. The latter always negates the narrowness of the binary code; indeed, it exceeds it. This is also one of the themes we encounter in Seremetakis' ethnography *The Last Word* in the context of modern Greece: the extent to which the women of Inner Mani rejected the iconography of the binary code, for it was unable to handle their historical experience. By no coincidence, those women turned to oral history and divination as modes of discourse in order to break and transgress the concepts of gender asymmetry.

Conceptual pairs can be separated from their original conditions of emergence; they are historically transferable. Kosseleck called this "a history of the effects of concepts that render certain experiential frameworks repeatedly applicable" (Kosseleck 2004, p. 182).

The origin of asymmetric concepts in the West can be traced to the distinction between the *Hellene* and *Barbarian*, which Kosseleck

identified as territorial asymmetry (spatial). As one follows the historical progression from the Hellene/Barbarian to the Christian/Heathen (pagan), one moves from territorialization to spiritualization, that is, from a spatial to a moral relation.

At this point, one could critique Kosseleck: His assertion that the Hellene/Barbarian differentiation is originary could be challenged by the fact that he began with a spatial relation of asymmetry. Possibly, it is itself a macrometaphor, a political one, which can be traced to the more mediate metaphor of gender relations that were asymmetric and characterized by spatial exclusion in Greek antiquity. Thus, the first transference could be from a male/female gender domain to a political-geographical domain of the Hellenes/Barbarians—for concepts that represent spatially separated and unequal groups constitute the common element here. One of the characteristics of the Hellene/Barbarian relation is that the Barbarian is always defined negatively, as the absence of Hellenic characteristics (that which is not—as in Simone de Beauvoir). This is a gendered logic. For Plato, the Hellene/Barbarian relation was a natural, biological one. Again, this is a gendered argument.

Furthermore, Kosseleck asserted that the extreme distinction between the Barbarian and Hellene has been used to fulfill certain internal ideological functions in the Polis, such as the relation between master and slave (and, by inference, man and woman). The alien represents an extreme case of nonrecognition and nonreciprocity, and thus, provides a moral paradigm that mediates the coercive, oppressive nature of hierarchical relations within the Polis: "within the interior of the Polis, master and slave related to each other and were capable of friendship" (Kosseleck 2004, p. 186). This cannot happen between the Hellene and Barbarian. Therefore, the role of the Barbarian is to humanize hierarchical relations in the Polis—to render them more tolerable, at least on the level of ideology.

Another characteristic of the Hellene/Barbarian set is that, in classical discourse, we can move from spatial to cultural differentiation. The culture and political order of the Barbarian are perceived in terms of noncontemporaneousness, of **nonsynchronicity**: the Hellenes and Barbarians occupied two different temporal continua in history; they were not contemporary with each other. The same argument re-emerges with the association of men with the forces of modernity and women with those of tradition.

In conclusion, the first differentiation made here was in space, the second was in time, and the final was in morality based on education—the concept of Hellene became a moral, educative, cultural category and lost its spatial specificity (i.e., one is now a Hellene if he speaks proper Greek, no matter where he lives). Once this occurs, the Barbarian is no longer negative, but a precivilized entity, being closer to nature.

■

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- Reinhart Kosseleck. "The Historical-Political Semantics of Asymmetric Counter-Concepts," pp. 155-191. In *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time.* Translated by Keith Tribe. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004 [orig.1985].

Notes

(1) Robert Hertz (1881-1915): French sociologist–anthropologist, whose work on death has been foundational. Published originally in French in 1907, became known in English-speaking social science in 1960.

(2) Reinhart Kosseleck (1923-2006): German historian, considered one of the most important historians of the 20th century. Interested in such fields as conceptual history, the epistemology of history, and the foundations of an anthropology of social history. Professor of History at Bielefeld University (Germany).

(3) Raymond Williams (1921-1988): Welsh academic, novelist, and critic. Best known for his work *Keywords* (1976), focusing on the meaning and context (rather than the philological–etymological dictionary definitions) of over sixty significant words, such as culture and aesthetics. Laid the foundations for the field of cultural studies. Professor of Drama at Cambridge University (England).

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TIME AND ITS TRANSFORMATIONS

As a cultural construct, time, like space, influences our conception of action, that is, how and when certain acts are performed. This chapter examines transformations in the concept of time and, more concretely, how these transformations determine behavior.

E.P. Thompson's (1) (1967) pioneering study on "time discipline" in **late medieval Europe** (1300-1650) offered a perspective on these transformations over time. During that period, there was no single system of time measurement in operation, as it is today. Instead, there were different systems of time measurement associated with urban and country life and different ones associated with specific professions and social classes. Clock time, with which we are familiar today, was then known as *merchant's time,* and it was the time of the courts and the cities. This was, in turn, opposed to the time system of the medieval church, which divided the day into a cycle of ceremonial prayers and ritual observances marked by the ringing of bells.

As E.P. Thompson stated, the dissemination and universalization of clock time was tied to the spread of economic rationality, discipline, and mercantile exactitude, which was organized around the keeping of books and the measurement of profit and loss. In the literature of the time, the universalization of clock time was characterized as the replacement of the natural organic time of the cosmos and of human biology (i.e., the beating of the heart) by an artificially constructed, man-centered time. This was a movement from sacred, god-ordered temporality to secular time.

Eventually, there was also a shift from communal time to personal time. The wearing of the watch on the body replaced the telling of time through communal mechanisms, like the bells of the village church or the town's clock tower. This constituted an individualization of timekeeping.

E.P. Thompson set out to examine the relation between time and labor discipline; how different systems of timekeeping affect and determine physical actions in the economic sphere. He linked the restructuring of

work habits, the culture of work, to new, inward notations of time. The first part of his study was concerned with premodern, precapitalist timekeeping systems, many of which still existed in tribal societies in modernity. In these cultures, time was subordinated to work tasks: time shrunk or was extended, for it was measured by the long or short durations it took to perform the daily round of subsistence tasks, such as crop-growing, cattle-herding, and food-processing. For example, the description of an earthquake that occurred in Chile in 1967 was described as lasting as long as the cooking of an egg.

The human body and changes in the natural environment were also used as measurements of time. Thus, these measurements could be broad, organized around changes in the weather and seasonal changes, or more narrow, organized around sunrise–sunset or minute by minute, based on specific labor tasks. The two systems were not integrated the way that seconds, minutes, hours, and days are. Each system of timekeeping was independent of the other, although they could be compared or contrasted to each other.

The plurality of time systems in a society expresses the subordination of time to human needs, requirements, and interests. In contrast, the systematization of time into a unified collective measurement system expresses the subordination of human needs to an externally imposed structure—to which people are socialized.

It follows that **time systems constitute political relations** between people. E.P. Thompson examined the political and economic usages of time as a determinant of human behavior. The social transformation of time in the 18th century was a political conflict in a microcosm that was organized around two contrasting notations of time: a) task-oriented time and b) time as a commodity, analogous to money—that is, the notion of time as spent.

In the older notation of time, work/life or labor/relaxation were not two separate spheres of activity, as they are today. To a certain extent, economic tasks were subordinated to the requirements of social interaction and exchange. This echoes the discussion of economic exchange systems by Polanyi, Weiner, and Mauss, presented earlier in the book. It was also remarked that in primitive, peasant, and other premodern cultures, workspaces and social or domestic spaces were integrated.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, with the growth of market economies and the replacement of exchange systems by currency, people began to leave their farms to work for larger farm owners or migrated to the city to work for wages. This created a split in time: a split between the employee's time and the employer's time. The employer's time was determined by the requirements of profit—time must not be wasted, time is money. In short, time became currency; time was no longer passed—it was spent.

But the labor force of that period was overwhelmingly rural, originating in a culture where different systems of time were predominant. The commodification of time that began in agricultural businesses was intensified in the late 18th and early 19th century with the emergence of manufacture industries in which the synchronization of labor was crucial—consider, for example, the assembly line. Previously, a craftsman made his artifact from beginning to end. Eventually, a new division of labor appeared, in which individual or small groups of workers were responsible for making the parts or components of an artifact and where no one person was responsible for its totality. This demanded **synchronization, a new discipline of time**—which conflicted with previous disciplines of time.

When one moved from agricultural to industrial labor, time became continuous, abstract, and uninterrupted. The rural workers who entered industry had to be trained to adopt a new system of timekeeping. The old system that alternated between long periods of continuous labor (i.e., harvesting) and long periods of inactivity (usually during winter) was replaced by the eight- to twelve-hour day. The irregularity of the working day and week had to give way to regulation. Thus, systems of timekeeping in the factory, such as clocking in and out, became predominant.

■

Time and Discipline

The process of training and socializing rural labor to commodified and rationalized time boiled down to the coercive use of time, including the falsification of the temporal experience. E.P. Thompson described early factories that functioned like a prison, where sunlight was shut out and only artificial light was used, so that the workers could not tell the passage of time by natural signs. Furthermore, workers were not allowed to bring in personal watches. The manager of the factories was the only person

allowed to possess a timekeeping mechanism. Thus, the factory space attempted to monopolize time. This extended to the falsification of time: the solitary clock in the factory, under the exclusive control of the manager, was pushed backward or slowed down to overwork employees.

> The clocks at the factories were often put forward in the morning and back at night, and instead of being instruments for the measurement of time, they were used as cloaks for cheatery and oppression…. (E.P. Thompson 1967, p. 86)

The economic model of time spread from the factory to the religious systems (i.e., Methodism). Religion, with its focus on personal sin and salvation, was a central mechanism in the individualization of time. The saving of time and the soul were considered identical tasks. E.P. Thompson termed this the *propaganda of time thrift*. It was directed at the working classes, such as proletarians who were transformed peasants.

The rationalization of time in factories established a strict separation between work time and leisure time. In Victorian England, leisure time for the working classes was a potentially subversive and dangerous domain of nondiscipline. The ideology of time-thrift was used to stigmatize the recreational culture of the urban working class and the peasants who were portrayed as "drunken lazy louts." Here, we have a prime example of the 19th century concept of high culture, defined as cultivation and used against the everyday cultural practices of the low classes.

Religion, with its ideology of time-thrift, personal salvation, and individual sin, was used as a central mechanism for the colonization of the dangerous sphere of leisure time among the working classes. This was done through a religious track that played on a fear of death and damnation and emphasized consciousness of mortality—the temporal limits of human life.

The dissemination, therefore, of the rationalized clock time was not a neutral, disinterested adaptation to a more logical or scientifically coherent model of time. Rather, it was coercive, imposed, and violent. It can be considered to be a form of cultural warfare that attempted to sterilize indigenous local cultural forms that ran counter to the disciplinary requirements of the labor market and which, perhaps, threatened the political stability of those institutions centered around the accumulation of capital, i.e., governments, the church, and the law.

■

Along the same line of thinking, the well-known Swedish ethnologists Orvar Lofgren and Jonas Frykman (2), in their important study on middle-class life in **Sweden,** pointed out that

> how a culture conceives of time reveals a great deal about the way people live and think; it gives us a key to the understanding of a society's cultural foundation. In the same way, altered views of time can clearly reflect radical changes in society. If we wish to understand the extent of the transformation that Swedish society has undergone during the past hundred years, it may be well to begin the investigation with a study of the way culture shapes time. (Lofgren 1987, p. 13)

The modern concepts of time, like all cultural phenomena, must be examined and understood in their historical depth. E.P. Thompson traced both timekeeping and management to the development of industrial production and the proliferation of factories in the 19th century. And Lofgren confirmed:

> [If peasant's time] can be likened to a wheel turning at the same pace as the working year and nature's rhythm, our time is perceived more like a line projecting into the future. Broadly speaking, time for the peasant was cyclical, while for us [it] is linear... is highly rational and strictly formalized, a unity that can be broken down mechanically into components: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, and centuries. (Lofgren 1987, p. 19)

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Against Linearity

Michel Foucault's (3) studies have added the role of formal education and schools to the above discussion on the creation of disciplinary time in modernity. The new pedagogy of the 19th century, based on unilinear evolutionary thinking, stressed

> education as a serial process consisting of a number of elements linked in chronological succession; this process echoes the 'natural'

> progress of the human soul and provides guidelines for teaching methods. Organizing the activities in a straight line creates a linear time that is directed toward a fixed goal—time as career. (Foucault 1977, p. 27)

C. Nadia Seremetakis (2009), in turn, has argued that linear, compartmentalized time, advanced by modernity, precludes any interpenetration of the present by future alterity. With her study and analysis of divination in modern urban Greece, she showed that, to comprehend divination, one must be able to comprehend and register **multiple temporalities**. Yet, the prevalent idea in social sciences, that cultures move from rural to urban—which is implicit in the conflation of spatial with historical distance and vice versa—is responsible for the tendency to locate the modern phenomena of divination within norms associated with primitive or small-scale village life. This renders such phenomena as primitive or picturesque relics of the past and silences the presence of relevant social norms and linguistic codes in everyday urban life. However, divination, like any other aspect of **modern urban culture, "demands understanding and registration of the rural in the urban and vice versa—not as a surface transposition of one on the other, but as an excavation of their historical depth"** (Seremetakis 2009, p. 339).

■

Labor Discipline and Body Spaces in Development

Aihwa Ong (4), in her study *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline,* also discussed the move from the village to the factory space (Ong 1987, Chapter 7), although from a different angle and in a different era and area than E.P. Thompson's study. She explored the relation of labor discipline and space in the modern Southern Asian culture, that of **Malaysia** (5), in particular. Her perspective shifted from existing to **emergent relations of power** and means of resistance to power. She focused on the factory space as an apparatus for the cultural construction of power: a space for the formation of both power and subjects to which power will be applied. In this context, Ong implicitly stated that new technology, i.e., microchips, is accompanied by new technologies for extracting labor discipline. A new technology in modernity manufactures the subjects first, to produce this technology (i.e., subjects who have the physical and mental disposition for the manufacture of computer technology), and then, to consume it.

In the factory, constructed as a disciplinary space, workers were surveilled via glass partitions by male managers, usually of different ethnic categories than the local female workers. However, in the factory, there were also several neutral, nonsurveilled spaces, such as the locker room, where women would sneak in to take naps; the bathroom, and the prayer room. These backspaces were contrasted to the front space, the factory floor, with its forced collectivity and disciplinary ethos. Managers saw these backspaces as spaces that promoted deviant behavior, **spaces of resistance**. The control of labor time was implemented by screening and forbidding trips to the toilet, the factory clinic, and the prayer room.

Another type of disciplinary control concerned clothing. Required factory outfits and shoes were perceived as depersonalizing and constraining by workers. The removal of personal clothes is a basic technique deployed by closed institutions for the transformation of personal identity. This is what Goffman would refer to as the loss of the personal "identity kit" (Goffman 1961, p. 21).

One detects here an assertion of greater personal command over the body space. Thus, the resistance to factory discipline was organized around the issue of the individual versus hierarchical command of the body space—a conflict most intense in spaces explicitly linked to the body, such as the bathroom or the locker rooms.

Resistance often has a bodily character. Anything that cannot be expressed in linguistic, verbal discourse is objectified on the level of bodily discourse. This bodily discourse was also encountered in the Comaroffs' study of the madman in South Africa (Chapter 9).

■

In conclusion, the **development** and/or Europeanization of Third World cultures implied a transformation in body imagery, along with a transformation in time and space concepts. Therefore, development here is understood and discussed **from the perspective of ethnography and symbolic systems** (and women, in this case). This approach is quite different from the dominant ways by which development is theorized in social sciences. In the latter, the theory of development is dominated by political science, economics, and sociology, all united by their focus on statistical data and, one way or another, on technological or economic

determinism. They tend to focus on teleological models of development and theories of stage development in which development is a progressive move from one economic structure to another. Thus, they look at development from the outside.

The anthropological perspective, on the contrary, demands and offers a view of the local conditions and everyday experience; societies on the threshold of capitalist development and modernization have experienced and interpreted these transformations in terms of precapitalist beliefs and practices, thereby transforming both the structure of modernity and tradition within these societies. This precapitalist reception is a creative, transformative, and symbolic mediation. The **cultural anthropologist, then, focuses on the interplay between the local and the global, between dominant cultures and institutions and subordinate ones, and aims at capturing the contradictions this interplay generates—contradictions that arise as people attempt to reestablish personal, social, and cultural coherence in the face of sociohistorical fragmentation.**

■

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Notes

(1) E.P. Thompson, (1924-1993): British social historian, professor at Warwick, and freelance writer. Best known for his study *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Launched the influential journal *Past and Present* with Eric Hobsbawm and others.

(2) Orvar Lofgren and Jonas Frykman: Well-known Swedish ethnologists. Professors at the University of Lund (Sweden).

(3) Michel Foucault (1926-1984): French philosopher, historian of ideas, social theorist, philologist, and literary critic, whose primary thesis was on madness and civilization, and the history of madness in the classical age. Professor of the History of Systems of Thought at Collège de France and, previously, head of the philosophy department at Paris VIII.

(4) Aihwa Ong: Malaysian-born anthropologist. Professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

(5) Malaysia: Country in Southeast Asia, with about twenty six million inhabitants. The capital is Kuala Lumpur.

PART VIII:

SYMBOLIC SYSTEMS

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

In the last two chapters, space and time were discussed as symbolic systems (as opposed to natural, fixed, cosmic constructs). This chapter turns to anthropologist Edmund Leach (1) and his argument that the symbolic construction of space and time is based on **a linguistic model**.

Language is used to segment visual, spatial, and temporal continua into meaningful objects, specific acts, and social roles. Language both divides these elements and combines them into relational systems (they have no meaning except in relation to each other). This is what Leach called *sets*. For example, we do not know what a red traffic light means unless we know what a green light means. "All signs, and most symbols and signals, cohere together as sets. Meanings depend upon contrasts" (Leach 1976, p. 33).

These objects or actions in relational sets are encountered in specific contexts and gain their meaning from their positioning in these contexts. A light switch on the wall has a functional meaning, but the same object in the street has a completely different meaning. Leach identified these as **spatial constructs**. The contexts within which we position objects or actions function as boundaries. These boundaries are artificially created. Thus, in many cultures, **transformations of space and time are usually expressed as the crossing of boundaries.**

Boundaries, frontiers, or thresholds are sources of anxiety and tension, since they classify the world we know and act in. These boundaries also have temporal dimensions, e.g., youth to adulthood, life to death. They are social dimensions that carry certain possibilities and limits. We have already seen how switching occupational roles from rural–peasant to industrial–laborer involved a transformation in the measurement of people's time and the installation of new boundaries, such as the eight-hour working day.

Leach remarked that, in many cultures, the sacred and the abnormal are closely identified with temporal and spatial boundaries and with the

movement between different borders of space and time. Moving from one bounded space to another and one bounded temporal continuum to another is a very charged and dangerous movement in which social identity becomes ambiguous, and then, transformed. For example, in our own culture, theater people have a tradition of superstitions, pretentions against bad luck, and mini-rituals that are centered on the dressing room, e.g., what someone can do and cannot do, say and not say in a dressing room, and which people are out of place there. Why the dressing room? Because the dressing room is the frontier, the border, that separates everyday social life from the artificial, special environment of the stage. It is the space where the actor sheds everyday social identity and puts on makeup and costumes to assume a new persona as a character in a play. Thus, the dressing room is a dangerous place of ambiguity where the everyday social persona and the theatrical one are mixed; they come into contact and then separate. (See also discussion of pollution in Chapter 20).

Leach revealed that our everyday relation to space and time is very metaphorical**.** We transform all our social situations into a map-like configuration, an itinerary that we carry inside our heads and express in our movements. The mapping of space and its labeling and transformation into an ordered and codified continuum is expressive of the culture/nature opposition.

In conclusion, the signs with which we map social space identify boundaries, entries, and exits; they are, in themselves, metaphors of social relations and behaviors. For example, there are various symbols that are used to designate men's toilettes from women's. These often change from culture to culture. In former Yugoslavia, some years ago, the stereotypic sign for women was a high heel shoe, while for men, it was an umbrella.

Readings

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- Edmund Leach. *Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols Are Connected.* Cambridge University Press, 1976 (See, particularly, Chapters 7: The Symbolic Ordering of a Man-Made World: Boundaries of Social Space and Time; 11: Mapping Time and Space as Reciprocal Representations; 13: Examples of Binary Coding; and 17: Rites of Transition).

Note

(1) Edmund Leach (1910-1989): British social anthropologist. Professor at Cambridge University.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SYMBOL, RITUAL, AND (DE)RITUALIZATION

In the previous chapters, language and kinship were discussed as symbolic systems. This chapter focuses on another important subject in symbolic anthropology, that of ritual.

Victor Turner (1) (1977), who studied sub-Saharan African rituals, defined **ritual** as a patterned sequence of activities which involve gestures, words and objects and which are performed in demarcated space; they have their own temporality and are supposed to influence supernatural forces in the interest of the performers.

There are different kinds of rituals. They can be seasonal, marking a change in the agricultural cycle (i.e., planting and harvesting), or a pastoral movement (from winter to summer pastures). They can also be contingent, marking an individual or collective crisis (i.e., the passage from one phase to another in the life cycle, such as birth, marriage, and death). Other types of rituals include initiation rituals, e.g., religious initiation; divination rituals involving the identification of evil; and beneficial rituals, ensuring the well-being and fertility of human beings and animal crops.

In the Greek culture, for example, there are rituals signifying various changes in one's status, such as a baptism (when a person acquires a name in society), wedding, or funeral, as well as rituals of purification for people, animals, or objects, such as an evil-eye exorcism.

Rituals are not fixed or static. New rituals are devised or borrowed, and old ones may decline or disappear. But the important point to remember is that the form of a ritual may persist and survive; thus, what often appears to be a new ritual is but a variant of an old one. Consequently, although the content of a ritual may have changed, anthropologists can still find the form, the ritual system, and its features in a society—especially in societies where change has occurred much more slowly, like Africa, for instance. Seremetakis' ethnographic works have also documented this in the context of modern Greece (Seremetakis 1991, 2009).

Rituals are composed of symbols. Symbols are actions or objects perceived by the senses in a ritual. The **ritual symbol** is the smallest unit of a ritual, or the smallest unit of a semantic structure. *Semantic structure* is a structure that deals with relations between symbols and the things they refer to.

Symbols have many meanings; they are polysemic. This is a central concept in Turner's work. Apparently disparate meanings are interconnected by analogy or association. Symbols condense meaning: many ideas, relations between things, actions, and interactions are represented simultaneously by a symbol. **Meaning** is ideological or normative, that is, it refers to moral and social orders. Meaning is also sensory or orectic, that is, expected to stimulate desire and feelings. For example, the milk tree for the Ndembu people of **N.W. Zambia** was a central symbol of a girl's puberty rituals. It was both normative and sensory. In the normative regard, this symbol represented womanhood and motherhood in a variety of relations, i.e., domestic, legal, political, and controlled by matrilineal descent. Each one of these aspects of the normative meaning was specified in an episode of the ritual, and all together, they formed a condense statement of the importance of femaleness in the Ndembu culture. In the sensory regard, the same symbol stood for breast milk (the tree excretes a milky latex) or the slenderness of a person (they used a young slender tree). Thus, the tree becomes the center of a sequence of ritual episodes, rich in symbols (i.e., words, objects, and actions) that express important cultural themes or norms. Symbols transmit cultural themes, and rituals are an important setting (form) for the expression of themes. (This can be related to the linguistic model of competence/performance, discussed earlier in this book.)

However, ritual symbols differ from the informal, spontaneous behavior that allows for individual choice of expression.

Each symbol has multiple referents. For example, the milk tree is found in a variety of rituals of a ritual system or cycle. Due to the process of selectivity, the important and relevant referents in each situation are underlined by a context of objects, activities, gestures, and relations between actors.

The symbol appears in many rituals, and its meanings are emphasized separately in many episodes. Members of a culture gradually learn about the values, rules, behavioral styles, and cognitive systems of their culture through the repetition, variation, and contrast of symbols and themes.

More important, people learn where to apply the symbols. A good example is the English word *can*. It is used to state *I can do something* and *a can of food*. Complex computation occurs in our mind to automatically understand which *can* we mean in each context. Similarly in Greek, depending on the context, the word *coma, κόμμα,* means a punctuation mark or a political organization, a political party; furthermore, the homophone *κώμα (coma)*, means a state of unconsciousness.

■

In conclusion, words acquire meaning in the context of other words. And we combine words to make sentences based on grammatical rules—subject, verb, and object. (Grammar and syntax are the form of language, what is termed *la langue* or *competence*.) Similarly, rituals are composed of symbols. Symbols are polysemic; they change meaning in different rituals. The same symbol is used in many rituals, but it acquires its meaning **in context.**

Rituals are often conflated with ritualized behavior. (Think, for instance, of our behavior inside a theater hall.) **Not everything is a ritual, but everything could be ritualized.** What constitutes a ritual? Rituals occur in fixed times or in reaction to specific events in a life cycle or seasonal cycle. They also occur in a separate space. They utilize separate linguistic and iconic forms, and are presided over by specialist performers, although they involve an entire community. They engage in metacommentaries on nature, society, reality, and cosmology. They are synthetic, and their general focus is on the unity and commonality of diverse experiences.

■

Deritualization

Rituals are not static; they change in time. In the process, they may lose their legitimacy in a society, and/or the general social structure of society and its attendant rituals may disappear. This process is called deritualization.

Modernity has often been experienced and critiqued as a process that leads to privatization and, thus, contributes to deritualization. This is attributed to the imposition of psychological and medical discourses that, as discourses of progress, attempt to rationalize certain sensibilities and

behaviors. It is also attributed to the erosion of local structures that previously allowed for social and performative contexts for rituals, as well as the attrition of social spaces beyond that of the ritual.

In a society where there are remaining rituals still intact with some level of legitimacy, we can expect that either their form or their content might change in reaction to the general process of culture loss, or at least, they may acquire a new significance and performative style for the community in which they are enacted. In the latter case, we may detect two things: a) the surface structure of the ritual may be performed in a highly formalized manner without the belief or emotional intensity that once accompanied it. This would be a further indication of a deritualization process. b) The performance of the ritual and the beliefs and emotions associated with it may be intensified to the extent that the ritual becomes an expression for a revivalist ideology.

When we consider **deritualization as a historical process**, we should bear in mind that historical change has an uneven impact on society. Thus, certain areas of social practice and knowledge will be changed or will disappear at different rates, while others will remain the same. The German philosopher Ernst Bloch (2) accounted for and termed this process the **nonsynchronicity of historical change**. The French historian Fernand Braudel (3) also identified a similar pattern in his discussion of different temporalities that characterize the transformation of different levels of historical reality and social structure. They both considered all evolutionary theories as historical distortion. Yet, as Seremetakis (1996) pointed out, they never turned to those cultures and societies inside and outside of Europe that had undergone a historically uneven and incomplete articulation with the economic and ideological forms of European progress, as anthropologists have done (see also the discussion of development in Chapter 16).

■

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Notes

(1) Victor Turner (1920-1983): British cultural anthropologist, well known for his influential studies on symbols and ritual passage in Africa. Professor at the University of Chicago.

(2) Ernst Bloch (1885-1977): German philosopher. Professor at the University of Leipzig and member of the German Academy of Sciences at Berlin (Germany).

(3) Fernand Braudel (1902-1985): French historian, leader of the Annales School of History. Professor at the Collège de France and member of the French Academy (Académie Française).

PART IX:

RITUAL PASSAGE

CHAPTER NINETEEN

INITIATION RITES

As previously discussed, individuals in society pass through several states in their life cycle, i.e., childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. These passages are marked by rituals or **rites of passage**—ceremonies accompanying an individual's life crises—that, according to anthropologists, follow three major phases: separation, transition, and (re)incorporation. After the individual leaves his/her previous identity, and until the new identity is established by ritual, the individual stands at the threshold (limen). This stage is a stage of **liminality.**

Arnold Van Gennep (1) (1960), for example, focused on puberty ceremonies in primitive societies, ceremonies that turn an individual into a man or a woman. He saw them as rites of separation from an asexual world, which were followed by rites of incorporation into a sexual world. This type of rite occurred at ages that had no specific relation to the physical appearance of sexual maturity. Van Gennep, therefore, found the name puberty rites unfortunate, for it implied a direct correlation between physical appearance and sexual maturity, that is, between biological or physical puberty and socially defined puberty. He explained that, since there is no direct correlation between the two, we should distinguish them just as we distinguish blood kinship from symbolic or fictive kinship and physical maturity from social maturity. (A taller person does not necessarily mean a more mature person.)

The puberty of girls was marked by certain physical changes (e.g., the development of breasts and beginning of the menstrual flow). But it would be very simplistic to develop a general schema of transition from childhood to adolescence based on the mere appearance of these signs. First, these signs do not occur at the same age in all races or among individuals within the same race. Second, these variations do not correspond to legal prescriptions. In Rome, for instance, social puberty preceded physiological puberty, but in Paris, it followed physiological puberty.

In the opinion of the public, boys' puberty has been established by the growth of a beard and pubic hair. But in this respect, too, ethnic and individual variations are great. For example, for the Thomson Indians, the puberty ceremonies marking a boy's passage to manhood depended on the occupations that he was proposed to acquire, i.e., hunter or warrior, and began between his twelfth and sixteenth year of age, when he first dreamed of an arrow, a canoe, or a woman. The Elema of the Papuan Gulf performed three ceremonies: the first, when a child was five years old, the second, when he was ten, and the third, much later, because it made the child a warrior and free to marry.

There is also a great variation in the age at which circumcision has been practiced, which shows again that circumcision is an act of social, and not of physiological, significance. For instance, in regions of Morocco, the time of circumcision was from seven days to thirteen years. But circumcision should not be understood or examined as an isolated phenomenon. The practice was equivalent to that of pulling out a tooth in Australia or cutting off the little finger in South Africa or perforating the earlobe or **tattooing** the body, or cutting the hair in a particular fashion in other societies. In all cases, the "mutilated" individual was removed from the rest of humanity by a rite of separation (e.g., cutting or piercing) that automatically incorporated the individual into a defined group. Since the separation marks were indelible, his/her incorporation was permanent (like the cutting of the umbilical cord). The Jewish circumcision, then, is but a "sign of union" with a deity and of membership in a single community of the faithful. Not all cultures perform circumcision.

Mutilations are a means of permanent differentiation. There are also temporary differentiations that are repeated at every change in an individual's life.

In conclusion, Van Gennep separated the biological from the social. Like Boas, he critiqued the notion of a universal biology; in other words, he culturalized biology by showing that all phenomena are culturally constructed.

■

Following Van Gennep, Victor Turner (discussed in the previous chapter) focused especially on the stage of liminality in the three-part structure of the rites of passage. He claimed that individuals in this stage are **betwixt and between**, that is, they exist in an ambiguous state of undifferentiated

communitas, an acute point of community through the sharing of a common experience. In this state, members become equal, for all differences are de-emphasized or eliminated.

Turner's concept of *communitas* as **antistructure** (absence of structure) has been criticized by later researchers as simplistic and idealized. In the Greek context, Seremetakis, drawing on her ethnographic research on death rituals in Inner Mani, demonstrated that it was the ethic of shared substance that brought people together, "in communitas," while clan boundaries remained. Moreover, there were also other divisions, beyond kin divisions, present in the rituals, such as the division between soloist and chorus, and women and men. Thus, an undifferentiated community did not quite happen.

Moreover, the concept of antistructure implied an inversion model, and thus, a dependency on the categories of the structure. But the death ritual of *klama* in Inner Mani was itself a social structure, and social structures have their own discourses. In this case, space determined one's discourse. There was no ascetic withdrawal from the world that coincided with the liminal stage, as Turner claimed. Instead, there was rupture with the world, and the world became an object of discourse in which social concerns predominated (see also the discussion of nonsynchronicity in Chapter 24).

■

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Note

(1) Arnold Van Gennep (1873-1957): Cultural anthropologist and founder of folklore studies in France. Professor and Chair of Ethnography at the University of Neuchatel (Switzerland).

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE RITUALIZATION OF DEATH

This section focuses on the particular ritual of transition known as death ritual because death is a central theme in anthropology. What is the connection between death and anthropological knowledge?

Philosophically, one of the signs that differentiate Man from animal is the possession of culture. Historically, the burial site was the prime sign that a society possessed a culture (animals do not bury their kind). In other words, the burial site signified an evolutionary development away from the animal state. This reminds us of the 19th century evolutionary thinking, which, coupled with colonialism, coincided with the development of archaeology (as discussed in Chapter 1).

Anthropology originated in **archaeology**. Archaeology was, initially, the archeology of death. Burial sites were the spaces where culture and its artifacts were deposited. The choice of articles and the amount and the variation of deposits from one grave to another in a community had to do with the way the community represented itself. Archaeology–anthropology drew out of these burial sites concepts of religion, economics, gender, kinship, and class differentiations, as well as technological development and subsistence strategies.

The coincidence of the birth of anthropology as a discipline with the opening of a burial site, a graveyard, reminds us of Levi-Strauss in the Amazon (discussed in Chapter 6): he began to take his census of the Nambikwara nomads the moment that death struck their tribe—he counted the dead—the absence as presence.

■

Van Gennep's model, which was discussed in the previous chapter, aimed at showing that the representation of biological processes—birth, growth, and decay—were explicitly cultural impositions and reworkings of certain biological elements. Van Gennep left any reference to the biological

behind him when he considered the ritualization of death. Previously, while exploring the rites of passage concerned with puberty or marriage, he dealt with living people who were undergoing biological states of transition. But, exploring death, he had to deal with the termination of all biological processes and change (1). Thus, death rituals, as rites of passage, inverted all other initiation ceremonies, for the transition in social status was not tied to the growth and development of the human body (such as in puberty), but to the decay and disappearance of it.

Robert Hertz (1960) focused on this last factor, for he considered it to be the most important. Like all Durkheimians, Hertz saw the individual primarily as a social category and only secondarily as a biological one. To his line of thinking, the individual as a social category was opposed to collective social categories, such as kinship, religion, and economic exchange, which always involved groups of people. The individual's biology and its limits separated the individual from the collective, both physically and categorically—death was a process of individualization. Thus, the physical body was both a social category and a collective object. It could be inscribed with the signs of collectivity, such as **tattooing and body decoration**, that signified membership to a group, for, in any rite of initiation, the first and most visible expression of change in the status of the person is the transformation in the appearance of the body.

The decay of the body meant its removal from the collective as a social category and as an element of solidarity. Hertz claimed that this subtraction of the body from the collective is contra-social, for it destabilizes the social order. As in Van Gennep's model of liminality, the corpse is an entity that defies ordinary systems of classification and escapes social structure. Consequently, Hertz understood the belief in the soul/body dualism as the society's attempt to maintain a social relation with the dead, despite the decay and disappearance of the body. The body was temporary, but the soul was permanent, conserving the social character of the person in the passage from life to death. The body was contra-social, but the soul was not. If the person, as a social category, was defined in most of these societies by his/her position in the social system, the soul was a continuation of the person's relation to kin categories.

The kin relations of a living person were expressed through the performance of obligations and exchange. When the person died, death rites mediated the opposition between individual and society by continuing the performance of exchange between the living and the dead. The body, although no longer completely part of the social world, had to be

preserved, because people had to maintain their social relation to the dead. The preserved body, or the extracted bones as the one permanent aspect of the body, could, thus, serve as a communication device between the living and the dead. The soul was considered to be semi-attached to the body, and the living could establish relations of reciprocity and exchange with the soul through dramatic performances that involved the remains of the corpse.

How did the living establish social relations with both the soul and the corpse? Both were perceived to be threatening, for they had just left the social order and were now unclassifiable, desocialized entities. But the extent to which they threatened the social order was measured in terms of the actual social status the dead held when living; that is, the more social power they had, the more dangerous they could be. This explains the *fear of the dead*, Hertz claimed. Fear, then, was not based on the physical repulsion of the corpse. He noticed that, in ranked societies, the death of those who were categorized as nonpersons—the stranger, the slave, and the child— were not ritualized with elaborate burial ceremonies. Thus, Hertz concluded that the **ritualization of death was not a process of physical, but rather, of social reclassification.**

The first operation in this process of reclassification was the need to resocialize both the body and the soul. Death rituals, then, dramatized and formalized the separation of the soul from the body and the separation of both from society. All these basic elements of a death event underwent the same three stages of transition: separation, liminality, and reincorporation. Hertz asserted that the body and soul, as well as the mourners who sought to preserve a social relation with the body and soul, all underwent parallel movements of transition and reclassification. Thus, to the same extent that the corpse and the soul were separated from society, the living relatives dramatized this separation by wearing separate clothes, eating separate foods, and secluding themselves in special spaces, disengaging from the normal activities of everyday life. In turn, the wider society viewed the mourners to be as polluting as the corpse and minimized contact with them. This signified the liminal journey that both the dead and the mourners had to undergo. The social order dramatized its temporary destabilization by death and its return to stability via the visible polluting condition of the mourners and their emergence from this liminal position. The final entry of the soul into the dead's domain corresponded to the soul's reacquisition of a persona into the domain of the living (because it was no longer isolated, but in social relation with other souls).

This thesis is related to that of Huntington and Metcalf (2) in their study of the Berawan in **Borneo** (3). They documented the shift in the status of the soul in terms of the different names it acquired at different stages of the life cycle of a Berawan. In short, the soul was going through an **initiation rite** similar to that of the living person who also acquired different names at different stages in the life cycle. Therefore, the belief in the soul and the soul's assertion in various transitional stages through which it acquired a social character inverted death into a form of birth—the separation of the soul from the body is analogous to the separation of a child from a mother after birth in many cultures.

The idea of the **secondary burial** was Robert Hertz's answer to the reincorporation of the body and its acquisition of a socialized status in tandem with the resocialization of the soul and mourners. By subjecting the body to various processes of transformation in preservation, the mourners could dramatize and facilitate their own reintegration into the social order. The emergence of the second body—the one processed and preserved—at the end of several ceremonies signaled the reemergence of the mourners from their state of seclusion and their reentry into society.

Thus, Hertz focused on two burials of the body. The first burial signaled the separation of the body from the social order and its dangerous state. One way of treating the body in the first burial was to preserve it. When the body emerged from the period of preservation, it was no longer polluting and was now a social artifact to be subjected to a second burial. The other basic technique was to bury the body and wait for its decomposition to separate the flesh from the bones. The secondary burial (practiced also in modern Greece) occurred when the flesh had separated from the bones. At that time, the bones were exhumed and subjected to various rites of purification and then redeposited in an ossuary, a place where all bones of the ancestors were deposited.

Based on these practices, Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (4) (1982), drawing on their field researches in **Madagascar and India,** respectively, concluded that, while the flesh of the dead served as a metaphor and symbol of the everyday and transitory aspects of social life, the bones, in their permanence and subjected to ceremonial treatment, were regarded as symbols of the permanence of social structure. In this case, social structure was symbolized in kinship terms—the gathering of all of the ancestors' bones in a single place. The placement of an individual's dead bones in the ossuary physically enacted the reintegration of the individual into the social order.

The anthropologists Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry added further dimensions to the Van Gennep–Hertz model, concerning the role of time and women in death rituals. They, too, saw death as contra-social. In this case, death opposed two systems of temporality: The first was the cyclical and repetitive time of the social order, which was also a collective time and was expressed in agricultural and biological symbols of fertility. Birth and agriculture were cyclical events occurring within discrete units of time. The second system was the irreversible linear time of individual death. There is a contradiction between the two, the collective cyclical and individual linear time. Thus, the role of death rituals was to deny irreversible time and to reorganize it into cyclical time. This involved the devaluation of the deceased's individuality that was expelled with the expulsion of the decaying corpse and, in turn, retrieved with the recovery of the bones. This recovery, the return of the bones to the social order, constituted evidence of the dominance of **cyclical time over linear time.**

In turn, the bones were interpreted as a deindividualized collective artifact—a physical manifestation of its ancestral status. The liminal stage of death rites involved the separation of mourners and death from all time—what the two anthropologists called *suspension of time* and what meant a reactivation of cyclical time. Thus, for example, Bloch and Parry discussed cremation practices in India as a revival of cyclical time and as a prelude to the liberation of the soul that is required for reincarnation. Reincarnation is an example of the dominance of cyclical time, of repetitive duration, over the linear and irreversible time of death.

■

It was previously noted that, when death occurs, certain divisions become concretely visible in society between the living and the dead, the society and the mourners, the body and the soul, and the flesh and the bones. Bloch and Parry pointed out that, in many death rituals, another division is that of genders. The separation of mourners for a period by society constitutes a division of labor. The occurrence of death means that society divides itself up into specific groups that deal with death and the corpse, and other groups that do not. This division between society and mourners is repeated a second time in a division between men and women within the group of mourners. Traditionally, it is women who deal with the dead.

Bloch and Parry asserted that, in societies where women are more closely related to death practices, men are identified with culture and women with nature. Since women are more closely tied to the temporality of biological

processes through their sexuality, they are closer to death. The relation between women and death is organized around an inside/outside dichotomy. Women, death, and nature are perceived as coming from the outside, while men, culture, and the living, are perceived as belonging to the inside.

At this point, one might think that, since women are tied to birth, they must be tied to cyclical time. Bloch and Parry countered this by stating that this relation between women and death was a socially regulated relationship, dependent on the rules and rites of marriage in a kinship order that was dominated by men. The rules of marriage and rituals of birth were expressions of men's control over what was perceived as uncontrollable sexuality. This latter linked woman to the equally uncontrollable domain of nature and death. In other words, nature was controlled through agricultural practices, and women's sexuality was controlled through kinship rules and regulations concerning marriage and birth. But death was indirectly controlled by the ceremonialization of death by women. Therefore, since women were more intimately tied to the domain of death, they were put to work domesticating it.

Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry's model is based on Mary Douglas' (5) definition of *the* polluting as a **matter out of place** (discussed later in this chapter). The notion of **pollution** is often metaphorized in terms of bodily functions. The expulsion of pollution is linked to that of excrement. The body, in this case, is organized in terms of higher or lower functions, e.g., the head as opposed to sexual organs. In turn, social order is often symbolized as a body, divided into lower and higher statuses that correspond to specific groups, classes, and roles in society. The lower social classes would be those groups that would be linked to the expulsion of pollution. In this context, women as the dominated, inferior group in society have been linked to the expulsion of pollution. We see this operant in the close association of women to midwifery, birthing, healing (nurses), and death rituals in many societies to date.

■

In conclusion, it was shown, first, how Van Gennep's tripartite model applied to a linear, simple transition in social status. Then, this was discussed in terms of the opposition of the individual to the society, the living to the dead, the mourners to the society, the soul to the body, and men to women, and finally, in terms of the temporal dimension, linear

versus cyclical time; thus, it was revealed that this tripartite model is not as linear or flat and geometrical as Van Gennep originally claimed.

Van Gennep and Hertz identified this tripartite structure in discrete ritual events limited in time and space and in the context of a normal stable social order. This was a conservative model of a social process that recognized that disorder entered society with events like death and always reverted to a normal homeostatic condition. But when Bloch and Parry introduced the issue of time and women in this tripartite structure, they opened the issue of liminality to a wider social definition and experience. Insofar as liminality, visible at certain moments of the ritual process and reflecting wider social conflicts occurring outside that ritual, it implied that the conflict between cyclical and linear time in society was a generalized social contradiction identified with particular groups of people and practices. Therefore, the role sets of the death ritual express wider social divisions between genders because of the different times involved.

Victor Turner also expanded the definition of liminality. But, as it was shown earlier, the opposition he posited between normal social life and a liminal state was not an opposition between structure and antistructure, precisely, because there were structures, roles, and divisions within the liminal domain. Thus, the liminal behaviors, in their wider definition, expressed a political opposition to specific social structures, and this was intensified, condensed, and dramatized in specific ritual events.

Philippe Ariès' (6) (1981) historical study of death rites in **premodern and early modern Europe** is also an implicit critique of such synchronic assumptions in which death rites are treated as appendages of other sociocultural institutions. Ariès, following Fernand Braudel, analyzed the cultural construction of death and death rituals under the paradigm of the **longue durée**, or deep structure. The death ritual is one of the deep structures of premodern social life. Ariès demonstrated that, despite the significant changes in other social institutions, such as religion and the economy, during the decline of the Roman Empire and the 12th to 13th centuries, there were fundamental continuities in death rituals and related belief systems and performances. The latter were nonsynchronous with other cultural codes and values. Thus, by treating death rites as deep structure, Ariès inverted the customary Durkheimian treatment of death, in which death is always the eccentric **event** and social **structure** is the epitome of permanence and regulation.

Like all synchronic studies, the study by Bloch and Parry treated the death ritual as a symptom and reflex of other social institutions. But in doing so, it also assumed that societies are seamless continuities structured by homologous forms and content (which implies an organic unity, i.e., each level of sociocultural practice is isomorphic to other levels). Societies appear to be organized by monosemic cultural codes and logic, i.e., fertility/infertility—a binary opposition represented in kinship, death rituals, economy, art, and gender organization.

However, society is not seamless. Not all discourses and practices structurally reproduce each other with homologous sign systems. The issue is not undifferentiated versus differentiated social systems (civilized/primitive). For instance, in the case of Inner Mani (Greece), consider the cultural construction of gender and gender power in the economy versus the cultural construction of gender and gender power in the death rituals (Seremetakis 1991). Women's autonomy and cultural empowerment was explicitly dramatized in the death rituals, but not in economic activities. As Seremetakis demonstrated, symbolism and the semantics of death and women's labor informed each other; there was a translation between these practices. Thus, by extending the ethics of cosmological care, women linked economic with mortuary practice. Similarly, since death was polluting, women organized it with an imaginary borrowed from their economic practices (the care of olive trees and cleaning of the land) that were considered nonpolluting. Likewise, since contact with the bones was considered polluting, women attempted to form a linguistic analogy between bones and land cleaning (from stones), to diffuse the polluting ambience with the symbolics of another practice.

■

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Notes

(1) Van Gennep and, later, Hertz were able to identify the continuation of life cycle transitions in social status, even after all life has ended.

(2) Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington: Cultural anthropologists. Professors at the University of Virginia and International Science and Technology Institute (Washington, D.C.), respectively.

(3) Borneo: Indonesian island, the third-largest island in the world and the largest in Asia. Population of approximately twenty million people.

(4) Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry: Social anthropologists. Professors at the London School of Economics.

(5) Mary Douglas (1921-2007): Italian-born British social anthropologist. Best known for her study on the concepts of pollution and the taboo. Professor at Northwestern University (USA) and a fellow of the British Academy.

(6) Philippe Ariès (1914-1984): French historian. Best known for his studies on death as a social construction. Professor (directeur d'études) at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences) in France.

INTERSECTION

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF POLLUTION

The physical world and its components, including one's body, are perceived as having a fixed location and a fixed set of relations, which is determined by that location. Accordingly, to bring into proximity two physical components that should not be in contact with each other creates pollution, or **matter out of place** (see Douglas 1966).

Pollution, or defilement, thus, is a classificatory, and not a substantive, category of dirt. As Hertz would say, pollution is a symbolic category. And Durkheim would confirm: it is a collective representation and a function of social institutions, not of biology.

For example, in Mediterranean societies, the interior of the house must be in a condition of purity, whether that is physical cleanliness, the proper display of religious icons that protect it, or the formalized observances of hospitality and social relations. Reciprocally, the street, a space outside the house, is perceived to be a domain of impurity. This does not only mean that measures must be taken to avoid the intrusion of dirt into the inside, but also that the guest who comes in must be managed and controlled to avoid bringing in defilement—for instance, traditionally in Greece, one entered a house with the right foot. Thus, protocols and forms of hospitality must be understood as mechanisms for managing and controlling the potentially polluting outside that the guest represents.

Another example of potential pollution is contact with blood. Consider, for example, the beliefs and practices about women's menstruation in many societies. Contact with it meant a violation of the social and biological orders. Blood has always been an evocative symbol of violence, both real and symbolic, which is disordering.

In Mediterranean societies particularly, the natural world has been perceived as inherently disorderly, requiring control and management. In most peasant societies, cultural order has been identified with the control

of human, agricultural, and animal fertility. This is expressed in the control of human reproduction—through marriage and inheritance rules, and incest prohibitions, all of which show that biological reproduction maintains sociocultural order. Uncontrolled reproduction, i.e., in the natural world (wild plants and animals), is disorderly and random. Consequently, women in these cultures have been perceived as anomalies, because they are part of both the kin group (cultural domain) and nature (uncontrolled sexuality). They are crucial to the biological reproduction of the kin group and peasant economy, yet at the same time, they are part of nature, due to their sexuality. They cannot be fitted in one single category; thus, they are potentially polluting.

Women's continuity with nature has traditionally codified them as a low social status group, therefore, suited to handling dirt (as housekeepers, midwives, etc.). Violence against women in the Mediterranean has mainly occurred because of their sexuality. The breaking of betrothal contracts, which implied the interruption of the planned and necessary biological reproduction of the kin group, was a form of pollution, which led to violent resolutions.

Violence against women in honor crimes can be seen as a purifying ritual. Several questions arise: To what extent today has the nuclear family inherited the sexual ethics of older, rural kinship societies outside the appropriate socioeconomic context? In this case, what is the relation of these ethics to today's violence against women? What happens when and if the kinship systems or rituals that existed and provided some protection from violence disappear?

Another example of pollution can be encountered in verbal insult. It repeats, in a similar fashion, the signs and metaphors of biological defilement. This is attested to in card-playing among men in Crete, as Michael Herzfeld (1985) has shown.

Likewise, contact with the dead is considered polluting, not for hygienic reasons, but because the dead person is an anomaly. As already discussed, the dead does not fit in one category, but in several: On one level, the dead person is still part of the kin group, an identifiable member with whom one has had a long history, established by reciprocal obligations and rights. On another level, the dead person is now outside the kin group. Being both inside and outside makes the dead person polluting.

Thus, the rituals of death aim at purifying both the dead and the kin group via formal mechanisms that facilitate the passage of the dead out from the kin group, the domain of the living, and into the domain of the dead and the ancestors, the Other World.

Natalie Zemon-Davis' study, to be discussed later (in Chapter 22), presents a broad, ritualized context within which death rituals can be placed.

■

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PART X:

GENDER AND THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF DIFFERENCE

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

BINARY POLARITY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Continuing and extending the previous discussions on the representations of the human body and of gender, this chapter begins by examining Shirley Lindenbaum's (1) (1968) study, which directs us to **Pakistan** and its model of cosmology.

Lindenbaum explored how real biological distinctions between genders are aligned with "constructed schematic arrangements," symbols and systems of classification, which are not biological in nature, but which draw on the authority of biological imagery to organize the nonbiological aspects of society. Like Vidal-Naquet, Lindenbaum focused on the imagery of the human body as being morally divided between the categories of left and right, and how this, in turn, divided it into distinct and separate categories of gender.

The model of cosmology in East Pakistan, still operant in many ways today, was organized into a fixed number of natural properties, humors (bodily fluids affecting health and temperament), regions, epical periods, days of the week, and signs of the zodiac. In this cosmology, numbering was extremely important. Cosmology divided reality into fixed numerical groups and, in turn, into categories of space, such as regions, planets, seas, zodiacs, categories of time, and categories of substance, the so-called humors. The latter were identified with fluids of the body that have moral qualities.

Things and people were also categorized as raw and cooked, ripe and unripe. All that was raw and unripe was untrustworthy and unstable. Another category was that of hot and cold, which was applied to foods and illnesses. All these cosmological classifications have been integrated into the Islamic laws concerned with the two genders in society. These Islamic codes function to limit free, unstructured contact between men and women. Each gender has a sphere of life allotted to it, and when it comes into contact with the other gender, specific rules regulate this contact.

Thus, all categories are used to characterize and reinforce the separation of genders and their spheres of life. They perform this role precisely because they are organized by dualistic oppositions, which are symmetrical to gender categories. Folk beliefs, many of which were pre-Islamic, have been synthesized with religious codes identified with the state.

Lindenbaum identified four areas that dual categories organized genders: social life, rituals, legal situations, and daily speech. Different linguistic terms distinguished male from female children; they emphasized metaphors from nature and indicated different innate characteristics for boys and girls. The metaphors applied to male children emphasized the ideas of mobility and social freedom, whereas those applied to female children emphasized gentle attraction and passiveness.

Other metaphors were linked to the division of labor, in which male/female children were identified by work objects, such as the plow or water jar, which adult men and women used in their separate economic spheres. Other markers of gender differentiation involved different conceptions of time for male and female children; the signs of the zodiac, which were different dream symbols that predicted the gender of the child to be born; and different shapes of the belly of the pregnant women. (The reading of the belly of the pregnant women, particularly its shape, size, and so forth, has been most common in Greece, as well.)

Lindenbaum organized all these categories under the left/right polarity (Lindenbaum 1968, p. 539), and under these categories, she located more specific moral qualities. For example, the left was associated with social restrictions and dependency, whereas the right was associated with mobility, independence, and political power. The right and left polarity was also dominant within the bodies of men and women. Furthermore, it organized social space, i.e., the seating areas in public situations. The right was associated with the public domain, business, and politics, and the left was associated with domestic space. These spaces also defined the economic spheres of men and women. Lindenbaum pointed out that these categories were symmetrical to the concepts of pure and impure.

■

Anthropologists who studied **modern Mediterranean societies** have identified similar classifications. Juliet Du Boulay (2) and Eric Wolf (3) were among them.

Du Boulay's analysis (1986) was closer to Lindenbaum's, because she traced the origins and legitimation of these classification systems to religious codes that inform folk belief. By anchoring her argument in the church, she gave the construction of gender a static, ahistoric quality. Church is a universalizing institution with a centralizing ideology. Thus, gender codes, if read from the perspective of church ideology, are national. Her model allowed for no regional difference, and it ignored pre-Christian beliefs, practices, and resistances to the church. Are we to assume that Mediterranean rural cultures were thoroughly Christianized? Historical evidence reveals that there was a high degree of syncretism between pagan and Christian beliefs and practices. Charles Stewart (4) (1994) and Seremetakis (1991), among others, documented such syncretism in modern Greece.

Similarly, in **Mexico**, Ruth Behar (5) (1987), following Jean Comaroff's (1985) track in linking the colonization process with religious conversion, showed that the model of progressive Christianization was abandoned when cast classifications were transformed to class relations. Then, the conflict between Christianity and witchcraft—which was the exclusive property of the working class and peasantry—settled into a binary polarity as static as class polarities. Confession lost its efficacy as a ritual that linked the confessing subject to the dominant institutional order. Christianization, which had attempted to forge a mass culture that crosscut class and racial differences, failed. A popular magical religious culture of resistance emerged and created a culture where two disjunctive cosmological systems, Christianity and the devil, coexisted.

Favret-Sada (6) (1989), in turn, demonstrated that, in modern Western **France,** a system that failed to sustain a viable relation to the market system was rectified through the mediation of a precapitalist system of beliefs and practices.

Salvatore Cucchiari (7) (1988) took the discussion on witchcraft a step further with his study on shamanistic practices of healing in **Sicily.** These practices**,** which had an oppositional relation to the Catholic Church, were partially transferred into the healing practices of Pentecostal Protestantism, an urbanized phenomenon that also had an oppositional relation to the Catholic Church. Both Pentecostal and shamanistic healing focused on the demonic attack of the person, usually women. For example, the divination of failed marriages that dishonored a person was common, and Pentecostal conversion emerged from this experience. In this study, as in Comaroff's study, the social–structural contradictions were signified in metaphors of

healing and were mediated by it. Since illness included a whole range of physical, psychological, and social phenomena, it also pertained to the issue of shame for women (versus honor for men); therefore, healing was needed for not been shamed. Here, the difference between traditional healing and the Pentecostal religion lay in the fact that the former integrated the inflicted person back to the community by expelling the object or condition of pollution, while the Pentecostal religion sought to negotiate the condition of being without shame and to reconstruct the relation between the individual and divinity. This constituted a privatization of the moral consciousness of the person.

Eric Wolf (1969) had earlier contributed with an important dimension missing from both Du Boulay's and Lindenbaum's studies. He, too, identified dual classifications, but he focused on the historical development of both of these classification codes and the institutions with which they were linked. Thus, Wolf was mainly concerned with how religion as a political institution is related to other political institutions, such as the state, and consequently, how systems of dual classification (linked to the political development of religion) are themselves political categories of power, control, domination, and resistance, and not merely static folk beliefs, habits, or cosmological speculations on the make-up of the world.

Along the same lines, Rayna Reiter (8) (1975), who studied modern **France**, attributed public/private and formal/informal binaries not to static, ahistorical religious codes or cosmologies, but to the increasing penetration of state power. She contended that the creation of gender dualities in spatial domains was equivalent to the creation of a gender hierarchy. Yet, Reiter identified this historical intervention solely within modernization; we find no historical transition within the premodern in her analysis. In this sense, she remained within the **community studies tradition (9)**.

There are several questions to be asked: To what extent is the effect of the state an exploitation and reorganization of residual binary codes? This attests to the rehabilitation and repositioning of these codes in different social formats, such as the market/nonmarket economic practice. What binary codes may have been operant within the economic domain prior to market penetration in the precapitalist era?

In the context of the **Mediterranean,** Eric Wolf has demonstrated that gender categories emerged within the historical context of an ongoing

conflict between state and local communities. The inability of the state to centralize political control generates a high level of disorder and instability of public life, that is, in the public arena of economy, politics, and warfare.

This results in a discontinuity between the impotent state and the security of local community structures. On the level of village life, this appears as a strong discontinuity and separation between public and private spaces, roles, and actions. In turn, this discontinuity is expressed in gender symbols.

This conflict presented a contradiction in the treatment of women, as Du Boulay pointed out. Women, in relation to the public domain, are represented as physically weak and vulnerable, and therefore, incapable of functioning in the public sphere, i.e., in economy and warfare. Yet, at the same time, women are the figures that hold and maintain the household and its members, including men. This thesis agrees with Wolf's thesis that the local community and domestic space are perceived as a stable structure, a sanctuary against the instability, violence, and conflict of the public sphere. Thus, women change moral character as they move from one social space into another: from inside to outside, private to public. They are strong in the domestic space, but weak in the public space. Men can also shift moral character as they move from space to space.

Du Boulay identified these spatial divisions in terms of religious imagery, where right/left dichotomies are also operant. Men sit on the right-hand side of women—repeating the symbolic position of Christ to the right of men, the devil (and women) on the left-hand side of men. If we apply Wolf's model to Du Boulay's discussion, it becomes clear that the figure of Christ that is political, male, and religious represents the public sphere. Thus, in this public domain, men and the right are associated with Christ, and women are associated with the devil. In contrast, when women are interpreted in relation to the figure of the Virgin Mary, a different set of moral characteristics would appear for women (see Du Boulay 1986, chart on p. 140).

Greek folk beliefs suppressed the historical development of these dualistic classifications by proposing another cosmology that traced the innate moral characteristics of men and women back to the personalities of Adam and Eve in the Bible. The foundation of gender division in the Origin myth (Adam and Eve), an authoritative religious text, enabled the ideology of gender to function as a component of the natural order of the world. This naturalization of gender difference by religious legitimacy obscured the

political character of these classificatory systems and their relation to power and control, which Wolf's analysis brought out.

Du Boulay identified a discrepancy between the formal cultural codes of this dualism and the actual behavior of people. Thus, women did not always see men as strong or of superior intelligence. This led to what Du Boulay, and later, Jill Dubisch (10) (1986), following Ernestine Friedl (11) (1967), called the difference between *appearance and reality*—that is, **formal cultural code and actual behavior.** In short, women acquired power as they conformed more and more in their life cycle to maternal ideals and roles symbolized by the Virgin Mary. Jesus and Mary became the positive set, while Adam and Eve became the negative set. The latter, with the Fall into Sin, is tied to the public space, whereas the former, which leads to purification, is connected to the private space.

This discrepancy between appearance and reality also resulted in the distinction between formal and informal relations of power. Men may be powerful in the public space, but they lose power in the domestic space. Thus, Du Boulay asserted that women could manipulate relations in the house to effect the decisions and actions of men in the public domain.

Within the context of Wolf's analysis, we see the public domain to be associated with hierarchy, inequality, and asymmetrical forms of power, while the private domain is associated with more egalitarian, reciprocal, and informal forms of power and mutual support.

The political question is asked by Natalie Zemon-Davis in the following chapter: What happens when the ethics and role sets of the female space take over the public spaces in rituals of inversion?

■

Let us first recall Nicole Loraux (12) (1986), who discussed this movement from household to Polis in **Ancient Greece**. Loraux studied *threnos* and *epitaphios logos*. *Threnos* (intense mourning) was oral, antiphonic, and collectively performed by women in cathartic emotional displays. It occurred in the household and the street. This was the kin group's way of presenting social death and its memory. *Epitaphios logos,* on the other hand, was written, textual, enunciated by men, and confined to the gravesite. Thus, we come across two forms of historicization, of record-keeping. Concretely, we encounter two **different modes of memory in conflict**—that of the state and that of the kin group. The state

appropriates the ritualization of death from the kin group, the household, and women, and resituates it in the civil domain, under male control. A female practice is transformed into a male one. This is represented by the *epitaphios logos.*

Loraux described how public cathartic mourning was curtailed by the state by Solon's law. This was an attempt to push this ritual back to private space, the household. Later, with the speech of Pericles, the state developed the institution of the civic funeral ceremony for the male war dead (13).

Another historian of ancient Greece, Page duBois (14) (1988), described this process as the archaicization of women. It was how the state controlled history and the functions of historicization, and relegated the timekeeping functions of history and women to itself. In her significant study, duBois demonstrated that this process was effected by a transformation of the iconography of the female body as an agricultural metaphor (a woman as a ploughed field) to a linguistic–textual metaphor, ***the writing tablet.*** There was an analogous instrumentalization of the earth and the human body. It was men who did the writing and inscription, while women were associated with illiteracy. (Vases were also sites of inscription—a variant of the idea of women as property.) This also reflected the extent to which discourse became a central apparatus of power for the Polis—both in terms of debate and in terms of the operations of the state and bureaucracy.

The ploughing of women echoes the "opening" of the female body in Renée Hirschon's (15) (1978) study in modern Greece. But in Hirschon's study, the "opening" was a symptom of domesticity, which was opposed to the "closed." What she missed was that the "opening" was a highly domesticated, male rewriting of the limited image of the orifice. For instance, in Inner Mani, the "opening" is bidirectional, not only the passage of the good. Hirschon's data—i.e., the ideology of the household predominating over church ideology—are symmetrical to duBois' data and call into question the binary chart provided by Dubisch and Du Boulay. But in response, Kosseleck would argue for the reproduction of binary logic in a transhistorical sequence—something that duBois would agree with.

■

Decentering Gender Concepts: Anthropology versus Feminism

Gender symmetry and binary representations have already been presented and discussed in various studies. Marilyn Strathern (16) (1988) dedicated her work to the critique and deconstruction of these very notions of gender symmetry and binary representations in the discipline that were prevalent at the time. She demonstrated their irrelevance when applied in Melanesian society, and in turn, she explored alternative modes of gender symbolization. In this sense, Strathern embarked in an explicitly anthropological strategy by exploiting the concept of cultural relativism and self-reflexivity.

Her studies, exceptional in the context of British anthropology, aimed at recuperating the ethnography of the gender relations in **Melanesia** that would be detached from any ethnocentric western projection of gender. Thus, the man/woman polarity in Strathern's study became "our conception of gender versus theirs." She decentered her own preconceptions of gender to achieve a depiction of the cultural process in which our concept of gender may be totally irrelevant. In this sense, she radicalized the content and thrust of Melanesian gender relations to be used as a counterpoint to our conceptions of gender power and domination.

Her first tactic, therefore, in *The Gender of the Gift* was to rid Melanesian culture of our projections in gender. Since we conceive of gender relations as components of a totality known as society, the first question Strathern asked was: "Is there such a thing as Melanesian society?" Studies on Melanesia emphasized social control, the integration of groups, and the promotion of sociability. She identified these as western concepts and issues that reflect our concepts of political power. By challenging these concepts, one would also affect our idea of gender in that culture.

The concept of social control, the integration of groups, and the promotion of sociability, which have been read out of Melanesian rituals, endorse and represent pertinent political issues in our own society and reflect the political context of the anthropologist. Therefore, they should be put into suspicion once we see them emerging into Melanesian society. This problematic relates back to the earlier discussion (in Part I) of comparative methodology, when the latter degenerates into a mode of projection onto the Other.

To decenter our concept of gender, Strathern proposed two steps: First, we must abandon the holistic model. Melanesian culture does not cohere into

a social totality analogous to western social totalities. The danger with all models is that the concept of system is made to appear as a subject of inquiry, rather than the method of inquiry. The thrust of cross-cultural gender analysis is to create levels of commensuration. Second, we must admit that the comparative method has failed in Melanesia—precisely because the comparative method is grounded on root metaphors (conceptual invariance)—that make comparison possible in the first place. For example, consider the concept of society: since all people have societies, we can compare societal forms.

Thus, Strathern demonstrated how gender relations in Melanesian society could not be compared to our own. Since her goal was to construct difference, she built her argument around three oppositions: we/they, anthropological/feminist viewpoints, and gift/commodity economies (Strathern 1988, p. 7).

How did Strathern construct difference? First, she reconstructed the local context of gender relations in Melanesia. She then showed the contextualized nature of all concepts—first *their* concepts and then *our* analytic concepts. To recover the context of this method, which is our method, she explored how feminist and anthropological contexts were intertwined. She argued that the contradictions to be found between feminist ideas and concepts and anthropological ones reflect contradictions in our social life.

She proceeded by first showing that Melanesians have nothing compared to our own concept of nature/culture. Removing this opposition will affect our concept of gender (which is organized around this opposition). Similarly, she questioned our individual/society opposition: we conceive of society as a unifying force that gathers together individuals who, otherwise, are unique. However, in Melanesia, individuals, far from being regarded as unique, were seen *dividually*, that is, each individual is a composite of multiple parts and contains a generalized sociality within. In other words, within the personhood of a woman, there would be male and female components; these have a social relation to each other that replicates male–female relations outside the individual. (This echoes Hertz's idea of the right–left hand as a social relation in each person.) As Strathern put it, "The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm" (Strathern 1988, p. 13).

One must beware here of comparisons with the 19th century theories, in which society was seen as a biological organism. This theories were used

to centralize and show a lack of heterogeneity. Strathern points to the opposite.

Thus, in Melanesia, the individual was not a unity, nor was society a composite, as in our culture. Instead, the individual was understood as a composite, and the gathering together of individuals for rituals was the creation of a unity. Collective events did bring disparate people together, but they did not make them into social beings.

Collectivities and individuals were paired entities; they came together as dyads. Collectivity did not encompass the individual. Social life in Melanesia was a constant movement from one state of unity (sociality) to another. Unity could be manifested singly or collectively. Thus, the individual was one type of composite form, and collectivity was another. The shift from one unity to another was most visible in gender symbolism:

> Gender is a principal form in which the alternation from one unity to another is conceptualized. Each male or female form may be regarded as containing within it a suppressed composite identity. It is activated as androgyny transformed. (Strathern 1988, p. 14)

In other words, the individual contained male and female elements, but one or the other became dominant in different situations. The female part would become dominant if your counterpart in a social relation presented itself as male and vice versa. (The counterpart here can be an individual or a group.)

Strathern described this process as the externalization of internal duality. In other words, the composite gender–parts of the individual were externalized among all the different participants in a social situation. "An internal duality is externalized or elicited in a presence of a partner: what was half a person becomes one of a pair" (Strathern 1988, p. 15).

Thus, to have a male–female relation in any social situation, the individual had to detach a male or female part of the self and give it to the other. Gendering was constructed through the performance of exchange, in action. What are the implications of this thesis? One has to stop thinking that an opposition between male and female must be the control of men and women over each other.

■

Strathern concluded by differentiating the feminist from anthropological discourses and critiquing the comparative methodology. Both feminist and anthropological discourses share the notion of an incomplete project. But unlike anthropology, feminism does not aim at adequate description, but rather, at the exposure of interest that informs description. Feminism, in other words, is the promotion of women's interests, the promotion of a single perspective.

Likewise, they both organize knowledge. But unlike anthropology, feminism does not view society as a transcendental, neutral entity, but as an ideological artifact that reflects different political ideologies (i.e., the upper class uses society differently). Feminism cultivates a plural form of discourse or politics—to be sensitive to the issues of women, it has to be sensitive to those of other minority groups.

Her response to the cross-cultural feminist dialogue was clearly stated: "It certainly cannot be taken for granted that simply because they are collected together, the voices will address their different versions of the same problem" (Strathern 1980, p. 29). In this sense, Strathern critiqued comparative methodology and universalism. The comparative method in anthropology is close to the feminist assumption that women everywhere can be asked about their domination by men. In both feminist and anthropological comparativism, societies are analogues of each other. They do things differently, but confront the same problems, i.e., nature/culture. Comparativity, for Strathern, is a device for organizing experience or knowledge; therefore, it is also a device for distorting knowledge.

In conclusion, Strathern, like Hertz, asserted that biological differences exist, but to transform them into differential treatment is a social decision. In the West, the solution appears to be the eradication of difference. For example, since all women share similar biological characteristics (which she calls *natural similarity*), the same questions must be asked of their conditions everywhere. This idea that men and women are dealing with the same problems, though with different methods and tools, is problematic. She, thus, stated clearly that she does not assume that gender relations are confronting the same problems everywhere.

Anthropology is concerned with how structures and social relations are made to appear natural, which results in constraining behavior and creating inevitable outcomes. Thus, while feminist scholarship is concerned with mutability, how things can change, anthropologists deal

with determinant forms, how things get determined. Based on this premise, Strathern questioned the fundamental gender project of measuring the presence or absence of male dominance. In Melanesia, she claimed, this male dominance remained undisputed in certain social domains.

Strathern effectively challenged two common ideas: first, that different societies cope with the same problem of human existence and second, that feminist analysis should lead to the eradication of difference.

■

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- Marilyn Strathern. "Anthropological Strategies," pp. 3-21. "A Place in the Feminist Debate," pp. 22-42. In *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

- Eric R. Wolf. "Society and Symbols in Latin Europe and in the Islamic Near East," pp. 287-301. In *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1969.

Notes

(1) Shirley Lindenbaum: Australian-born American cultural anthropologist, best known for her work on *kuru* sorcery in New Guinea. Professor at City University of New York Graduate Center and, previously, at The New School for Social Research (New York).

(2) Juliet Du Boulay: Social anthropologist, known for her work in Greece between 1961 and 1973.

(3) Eric Wolf (1923-1999): Austria-born American anthropologist, best known for his study *Europe and the People Without History.* Distinguished professor at the City University of New York Graduate Center.

(4) Charles Stewart: Cultural anthropologist, known for his work in Greece. Professor at University College London (England).

(5) Ruth Behar: Cuban-American cultural anthropologist. Professor at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor).

(6) Jeanne Favret-Sada: French anthropologist. Professor (directrice d'études) of religious studies at École Pratique des Hautes Etudes.

(7) Salvatore Cucchiari: Italian anthropologist. Previously, Faculty member at Colgate University (New York).

(8) Rayna Reiter (Rapp): American cultural anthropologist, specializing in women's studies. Professor at New York University and, previously, at The New School for Social Research (New York).

(9) **Community Studies in the Mediterranean**, starting in the early 20th century, viewed the isolated village as a fundamental cell of the particular society. Initially, these studies focused on the family in terms of its division of labor and distribution of social roles, and on the community in terms of its social hierarchy and power relations. After World War II, the focus shifted from the family to an analysis of the social and psychological consequences of the introduction of technical progress in agriculture and the political, social, and cultural implications of the strengthening relations from town to countryside—town and country often depicted as two confronting civilizations. The cultural codification of village life, such as honor, shame, and revenge codes were analyzed under the rubric of tradition, and tradition meant something stable, enduring, precapitalist, non-competitive, and primary. The village was but an isolate, confronting foreign, cultural, and economic penetration for the first time.

Social anthropologists John Davis (*People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology,* Routledge, 1977) and Jeremy Boissevain ("Uniformity and Diversity in the Mediterranean" in J. G. Peristiany's *Kinship and Modernization in the Mediterranean*, 1976) were among those who advocated for a unified paradigm for the cultural comparativity of Mediterranean societies. But it was the classic work of Fernand Braudel (1949) that made the most comprehensive case for approaching the Mediterranean as a unified geographical, historical, and cultural region. Similarly, Wallerstein and anthropologists Jane and Peter Schneider later approached European studies from the point of view of a world system, pointing to economic relations of gross inequality between the Northern European mercantile industrial centers and the food-producing sectors of the Mediterranean [see *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (1976)]. Later historians, like Andrew Hess (*The Forgotten Frontier*, University of Chicago Press, 1978), critiqued Braudel for obscuring deep structural contradictions between Christian and Islamic societies and for not accounting for the rapid historical and cultural divergence of the

northern and southern regions in the 16th century. Jane and Peter Schneider and Wolf supported this argument.

(10) Jill Dubisch: Cultural anthropologist, known for her work on gender in modern Greece. Professor at Northern Arizona University (USA).

(11) Ernestine Friedl (1920-2015): American anthropologist, who studied gender and kinship in rural Greece. Professor and dean at Duke University.

(12) Nicole Loraux (1943-2003): French historian of Classical Athens, Vidal Naquet's student, particularly known for her gender analysis in ancient Greek history. Professor (directeur d'études) at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences) in France.

(13) Margaret Alexiou identified the dichotomy between discursive forms in archaic funeral rites, *threnos* and *epitaphios logos*, in her book *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1974).

Margaret Alexiou is an emerita professor of modern Greek and comparative literature at Harvard University.

(14) Page duBois: Cultural theorist and historian, known for her work on women in Ancient Greece. Professor at the University of California-San Diego.

(15) Renée Hirschon: Social anthropologist, specializing in migration and gender studies in Greece. Professor at St. Peter's College (Oxford) and, previously, at Aegean University (Greece).

(16) Dame Ann Marilyn Strathern: a British anthropologist. Specializes in Papua New Guinea and is best known for her boo*k The Gender of the Gift.* From her doctoral thesis (1972) to her recent publications, she challenges concepts and definitions of gender. Professor at the University of Cambridge.

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CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

PERFORMANCE SPACES AND BODILY PRACTICES: THE BINARY CODES INVERTED

Rituals of role reversal have a long history and genealogy in the Mediterranean. Death rituals are one example.

Natalie Zemon-Davis (1) (1975), in her study on **early modern France**, (2) provided a broad ritualized context, as well as a historical framework in which to place death rituals. Her argument centered on two characteristic points. The first point was the inherent disorderliness of women, which has been sacralized and fixed in religious belief, based on the role of Eve in the Garden of Eden (where women subverted hierarchical authority).

The second point was the natural disorderliness of women, which was based on the cultural construction of their physiology, in early modern Europe—a pattern also prevalent in contemporary Mediterranean peasantries. For example, women were considered to be composed of cold and wet substances, whereas men were composed of hot and dry substances. The woman's womb was often compared to a hungry animal that had no fixed location in the body; by wandering around from one part of the body to the other, it could overturn the capacity of speech and cognition and force women to delirious and irrational mental states.

The cult of the Virgin Mary, despite its elevation of one woman, reinforced the notion that women and their biology are inherently disorderly, since the Virgin Mary's sacralization was predicated on her overturning and transcending her natural biological condition through the miracle of a virgin birth. Thus, women's higher faculties, i.e., speech, cognition, and reasoning, were generally thought to be ruled by the low orders, that is, the uterus and the womb. Put differently, the low, "natural"

order of the womb and the uterus had the capacity and power to rule and overturn the high orders of language, reasoning, and cognition.

In this context, we witness the cultural imagery of the body as a sociological mapping of the tensions and conflicts of that society, of which the body was a part. Women, as a social group, representing the lower, more naturalized order of society, were perceived as wanting to overturn the rule of men, the higher order of society. A prime example of this was the close association of women with the powers of nature and witchcraft. Witchcraft is usually interpreted as irrational beliefs in the supernatural. Thus, the strong linkage between women and witchcraft signified the accumulation of invisible social power in society by women and, therefore, it constituted a potential and invisible domain of gender revolt. This linkage, therefore, should be seen as a decentered political construct.

Zemon-Davis identified a variety of counter-insurgency institutions and techniques for controlling women. These included religious controls and training that attempted to discipline the natural biological disorder of women and labor discipline in the form of domestic labor that regulated women's bodies through economic systems.

She also traced a historical pattern of the increasing subjection of women as a social group in European society in the 16^{th} to 18^{th} centuries. This subjection proceeded via the following sociological processes: The patriarchal family's social organization was reinforced by more efficient forms of property acquisition, such as primogeniture (the right, by law or custom, of the first born son to inherit his parents' property). In addition, there was an increasing articulation of state systems with a patriarchal family organization. The model of the monarchical state, the doctrine of the divine right of kings to rule, and the notion of the male-dominated patriarchal family all mirrored each other as paradigms of social political order.

In other words, the culmination of patriarchy and capitalization meant the gradual removal of women from all economic activities not connected to the domestic space and the increasing privatization of women. Zemon-Davis asserted that women prior to this period had greater socioeconomic autonomy and mobility. The process of patriarchization, capitalization, and the state penetration of social life meant that women were denied formal access to social power. She concluded that, given the above processes, we should begin looking at the informal access of social power that women possessed or developed.

During the above processes, the family became the topos for the implementation and discussion of the various forms of social and political authority. Furthermore, the subjection of women in the domestic space was elaborated upon as a model for the subjection of potentially disorderly elements of society by hierarchical state and religious systems:

> Jean Calvin, himself a collapse of ecclesiastical hierarchies, saw the subjection of the wife to the husband as a guarantee of the subjection of both of them to the authority of the Lord. Kings and political theorists saw the increasing legal subjection of wives to their husbands (and the children to their parents) as a guarantee of the obedience of both men and women to the slowly centralizing state—a training for the loyal subject of seventeenth-century France or for the loyal subject of seventeenth-century England. 'Marriages are the seminaries of States,' began the preamble to the French ordinance strengthening parental power within the family. For John Locke, opponent of despotic rule in commonwealth and in marriage, the wife's relinquishing her right of decision to her husband as 'naturally…the abler and stronger' was analogous to the individual's relinquishing his natural liberties of decision and action to the legislative branch of government. (Zemon-Davis 1975, p. 128)

At the same time, a cultural imagery emerged in literature and visual arts that categorized the world upside down—that is, a collation of imagery that emphasized the overturning of social order and authority by various subverting figures, such as death, war, plague, and women:

> The female's position was used to symbolize not only hierarchical subordination but also violence and chaos. Bruegel's terrifying Dulle Griet, painted during the occupation of the Netherlands by Spanish soldiers, makes a huge, armed, unseeing woman, Mad Meg, the emblem of fiery destruction, of brutal oppression and disorder. Bruegel's painting cuts in more than one way, however, and shows how female disorderliness—the female out of her place—could be assigned another value. Next to Mad Meg is a small woman in white on top of a male monster; it is Saint Margaret of Antioch tying up the devil. Nearby other armed women are beating grotesque animals from Hell." (Zemon-Davis 1975, p. 129)

However, a renewed intensification of cultural play in literature, art, and festivity coexisted with this increasing formal subordination of women and the analogous subordination of the lower social classes, the peasantry, and the proletariat. This cultural play (3) emphasized gender inversion, the dressing and masking as a member of the opposite sex—men dressed as women and vice versa—and performing each other's customary roles. Zemon-Davis stated that this inversion of dress and role had little to do with homosexuality, sexuality, or psychological stress. It was a political metaphor.

In conclusion, one standard view of rituals and forms of inversions has been that, by inverting the normal order of society, by standing it on its head periodically, they simply reinforce its authority. Put differently, by clarifying its structure, by providing accessible images of social order and disorder, the normal pattern of society is linked to order. This is also a way of relieving accumulated tensions and conflicts in hierarchical societies.

Zemon-Davis opposed this model that portrays rituals of inversion as a temporary suspension of authority by comic images and the ultimate reinforcement of hierarchical authority. Instead, she claimed that these rituals contain the possibility of political disobedience, the expression of social criticism that cannot be aired in more formal arenas of society. They express conflict over the distribution of power in hierarchical societies. For example, the fact that men of the low orders dressed like women, the symbolic personification of disorder, in carnivals, festivities, and even during political riots in France, allowed them to perform a political critique and express political resistance. The complement to this was the imagery of women dressed and acting like men. These rituals were discourses that made the political point that women can act with competency and power and effectiveness in domains of action usually associated exclusively with men.

In visual arts and literature, the image of women dominating men was often used by the artist and author to critique and pass judgment on the customary behavior and social roles of men. When these sexual inversions took place in the context of popular festivals and rituals, they acquired a magical component that made them very powerful. [This also establishes a linkage with death rituals and the power that women's discourse acquired within these domains, as discussed by Seremetakis (1991) in modern Greece.]

These festivals, just like the Feast of Fools and Carnival, were perceived as cycles of nature and as part of a cosmological order that had a transcendent power over the more limited social order; they could also overturn social order periodically. Many of these rituals that exploited transvestite imagery were tied to the movement of seasons and to agricultural cycles. In both cases, the intrusion of a natural order into the social world and the destabilization of that social order by the laws of nature, of which death is one of the highest expressions, were symbolized with the iconography of the female.

Thus, Zemon-Davis concluded that the concept of a disorderly nature, and the female as an expression of it, particularly evident in Carnival and other rituals of inversion, began to be interpreted as a political metaphor for the overturning of social order.

■

Readings

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- C. Nadia Seremetakis. "The Ethics of Antiphony," pp. 99-125 (Chapter 6). In *The Last Word: Women, Death and Divination in Inner Mani.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

- Natalie Zemon-Davis. "Women on Top," pp. 124-151. In *Society and Culture in Early Modern France.* London: Duckworth, 1975.

Notes

(1) Natalie Zemon-Davis: Canadian and American historian of the early modern period, known for her studies of France and her focus on gender. Professor at Princeton University (New Jersey) and at the University of Toronto (Canada).

(2) The early modern period spans from the Renaissance (about 1500-1550) to the Revolution (1789-1804).

(3) For the importance of the play element in culture and society see *Homo Ludens* by the Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1949), originally written in 1938.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

CARNIVAL

Carnival was the preeminent rite of inversion. Carnivals throughout **Southern Europe** exploited the natural symbolism of seasonal passage and agricultural cycles to dramatize and express paradigms of order and disorder.

Thus, Carnival was the event that demarcated the end of one annual cycle and the beginning of the next. For anthropologists, the celebration of carnivals, in which people separate themselves from customary social roles and occupations by masquerading, is comparable to rites of passage—that is, rituals that commemorate change in a person's status within his/her life cycle. In the case of Carnival, however, the temporal cycle was not measured based on the cyclical repetition of the seasonal passage. Carnival occurred on the borderline between winter and summer, on the margin of the seasons of infertility and fertility.

The seasonal cycles and their commemoration in Carnival reflected a particular concept of time. During the year, time flew normally and unidirectionally toward the future, but during the festive period, the normal flow of time was interrupted. These interruptive durations were liminal phases, that is, phases between the normal divisions of time: past, present, and future.

In short, Carnival accomplished three things:

- It demarcated a temporal order, separate from the normal, continuous flow of time;
- It established a transitional period that marked the passage from one time structure to another, which is usually the passage from secular to sacred time. In this transitional period, time either went backward or was disordered and provided the structure for role reversal;
- At the end, it allowed for the reintegration of the population back to its normal order of time. The masquerading repeated the same

> sequence, separation–reversal–reintegration: the putting on of a mask, the role reversal that accompanies it, and the formalities following the termination of masquerading.

According to Edmund Leach (1976), this sequence reflected the transition from life to death, from the beginning to the end of the year, and finally, from death to life, in which the Carnival provided a medium for resurrection. For the historian of France, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (1) (1979), the three phases were expressed in the following way. The first phase emphasized demonic imagery, dancing, and symbols of death and witchcraft. The second phase highlighted a status reversal, in which poor people could buy expensive food for a penny and rotten, low-status food for a high price. The third phase consisted of a formal procession of images of authorities, which also expressed social stratification in society. The carnival ended with the burning of an effigy, a personification of the carnival itself, which functioned as a scapegoat through which people purified themselves of the sins and pollution of the previous year and during Carnival. The ending of the carnival was the beginning of Lent, the ultimate Christian period of purification.

Ladurie highlighted the transition from Carnival to Lent as a ritualized transition from pre-Christian and pagan to Christian worldviews. Thus, the demonic imagery of the first phase of Carnival was an iconography of pagan guards and spirits that were now remembered and recollected as play forms, because people no longer worshiped those Gods they played. The final procession of priests, judges, and soldiers reflected an iconography of the moral order of Christian society.

The image of pre-Christian or pagan personification—along with the images of women and the seasonal death or infertility—expressed a paradigm of disorder. Carnival was in direct opposition to Lent. If Lent was a ritual of purification that stressed ascetic values, i.e., the denial of food, sex, and alcohol, **Carnival could be seen as a celebration of pollution** that valued what Lent denied. Within this framework, the concepts of sin, guilt, and moral punishment or rectitude are not psychological, individualistic characteristics, as in our society. Rather, they express the divergent and oppositional involvement in two different cultural orders, the pagan and the Christian. To be sinful was to embrace the pagan worldview, with all its cultural and iconographic paraphernalia and repertoires. To be moral meant to accept the rigidity and hierarchy of Christian social order. Within the overarching context of a Christian society, this performative display had a definite political and critical thrust.

For example, the imagery of war and the military, such as the poor people's sword dance and pretended kidnappings and rapes, revealed the ambience of conflict between social groups and cultural systems. Carnival was also a ritualized conflict in which a suppressed or marginal system of symbols expressed its disjunction with the customary order of society.

We find the same patterns occurring in the death rituals, where women, a dominated group, used an explicitly pre-Christian symbolic form, the epic narrative of the mortuary song, the lament, to express their worldview (2). These songs, like the Carnival, focused on the imagery of pollution and transgression.

Carnivals emphasized animal imagery and established a strong connection between the animalistic, the demonic, and the dead. Certain masked personas represented either demons or dead souls. The presence of the dead among the living in a controlled form, such as the masquerade, was supposed to facilitate the renewal of fertility and the protection of crops. This was contrasted with the presence of the demons and the dead outside the demarcated Carnival time; their infiltration of the normal world was considered to have negative effects on health and agricultural wealth and security.

Ladurie presented three functions of the Carnival:

- It was cathartic; it eliminated pollution as a prelude to Lent;
- It was a ritualized replay of the human life cycle: birth, copulation, death, and resurrection. By mimicking these processes, the celebrants could affect the dynamic movement of the cosmological cycle, and this would precipitate a renewed fertility in nature;
- It was a ritual of economic reproduction. The economy was, effectively, renewed through the ritualistic mimicry of its typical activities and tools. Thus, by performing certain actions and recreating certain realities in a theatrical context, the participants sought to reinforce or affect these economic realities in real life.

Despite their seriousness, these issues were expressed mainly through satire and humor. The satire focused on social categories or groups, like the gypsies, women, Jews, priests, and rich, which potentially had disrupting effects on the day-to-day socioeconomic life of the celebrants. Ladurie considered this satire to be a transition from a ritual paradigm concerned with the control of nature to a paradigm concerned with the controlling of control; that is, the limiting of the domination effects of

those groups that possessed political economic power in society or those groups that seemed to have invisible control over social life, i.e., women, witches, and other outsiders:

> Symbolic and biological struggles between the seasons, then, reemphasized the practical and normative struggles between political factions, between ongoing governments and malcontents shouting 'get them out fast.' (Ladurie 1977, p. 314)

In other words, Ladurie saw Carnival as a dynamic and oppositional mapping of both the social and economic structures of a particular community and the political conflicts of the community. Food symbolism was particularly central to the expression of the political and economic conflict and was the fundamental form of folk discourse. Food that was sour, salty, rotten, or bad smelling represented the life experiences of the low, the poor classes. Even the parts of the animal distributed to people during Carnival emphasized their social categories: the head of the cow was given to lawyers, the genitals to women, and the belly to priests. Animal symbolism and food symbolism had multiple levels of meaning. They were expressions of fertility and infertility, of sexuality and intellect, and of class distinctions.

The animal functioned as a third figure in the binary oppositions between genders and socio-economic groups. Rather than expressing their conflict toward each other directly, the animal experienced the brunt of the violence through being killed, butchered, and consumed. People could express conflict indirectly through the medium of the animal. In turn, the collective eating of a symbolically significant animal could express the reinforcement of social solidarity and cohesion within a social group.

The sharing and exchange of group-specific symbols could also express general social cohesion. The poor and rich could exchange their symbolic food products with each other as a mode of communication. This could also occur between men and women (Ladurie 1977, p. 319, p. 321).

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Mikhail Bakhtin (3), in turn, saw Carnival as a ritual space where the body was intensified and became central in an exaggerated form vis-a-vis the socially acceptable bodily norms. It was an anti-authority communication

event whereby the malformed body, **the grotesque**, was a transitive condition, a prelude to renewal, and a reassertion of the norm. It was a body that mediated; it was not an end in itself. The differently formed, the world upside down, was overturned right-side up after Carnival. This was a cyclical model that reaffirmed the norm, i.e., women returned to the domestic role, and the hierarchy between peasants and nobles was restored. Yet, Carnival could lead to revolt.

In modernity, however, the grotesque ceases to be transitional. It is wholly negative and set apart from the sublime and beautiful—it is not its condition of possibility. The grotesque originated in small terra-cotta figure grottos. The grotesque body showed two or more bodies in one; it was *anamorphic*—one form arising from the other. Its power lay precisely in the fact that it did not have a stable form. It was not a body under control. It was blended with the world, with animals and objects; therefore, it negated strict definitions of what was meant to be individual and human. This can be contrasted to the classical body of religious and, later, aesthetic iconography.

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In conclusion, Carnival was participatory. Today, instead, the media, the state, and the commercial market have detached spectacle from the participatory aspect, thereby creating the passivity of the consumer. The participatory dimension of Carnival meant that the folk could play with sign systems and distort or invert them, creating new meanings. Today, the media and the corporate world need to market and sell signs; therefore, they need to control and define the meaning of the sign. Hence, the spectacle or the carnivalesque is a spectacle without communitas, since it aims at the individual consumer. This has had political consequences, particularly in developing nations.

According to Bakhtin, the grotesque and the obscene, central sign systems of Carnival, belonged to plebian life as a means of resistance to dominant culture and as a refuge from it. The grotesque and the obscene were parodies that undermined official power and codes. One could argue that today, the mediatic and corporate advertising, and even the state, orchestrate the grotesque and obscene to rob everyday life of its reality, its immediacy, and, in turn, replace it with a sellable fantasy-world of desired objects, bodies, and images that are unrealizable in everyday life for the most part.

In premodern times, Carnival was meant to be a festival of plebian consumption, where food and drink and the social imagination were celebrated and scarcity was momentarily banished from everyday life. This can be contrasted with the carnivals of our modern time, which are characterized by the marketing of the grotesque, the obscene, and the festive; there, it is the people themselves who are ultimately consumed by the vast machinery of sign production and who are played with by the sign systems of commercial consumption. The social imagination that was liberated by Carnival is now imprisoned in the spectacular as a dream.

When the carnival season comes upon us, it would be useful to remember these original functions of Carnival. Then, perhaps, modern carnivals can provide the opportunity for the momentary inversion of the banal culture of the spectacle that now governs everyday life and, in doing so, provide a chance for people to enjoy and feast on our own imaginations for a while.

■

Readings

- Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. “The Winter Festival,” pp. 305-324. In *Carnival in Romans.* Translated by M. Feeney. New York: G. Braziller, 1979.

Notes

(1) Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie: A leading social historian of France, best known for his work on the history of the peasantry. Professor and chair at the Collège de France and, previously, at the Université de Paris (the University of Paris-Sorbonne).

(2) Guy (Michel) Saunier, in his analysis of Greek folk songs on death, also testified about different worldviews between people and church in their perception of the Other World, paradise and hell, the afterlife of the dead, and resurrection. Death for people is an unjustifiable violation (as Simone de Beauvoir would agree) and the ultimate evil, for which God is responsible. (Saunier, Greek Folk Songs-The Laments, Athens: Nefeli, 1999).

Guy Saunier: Professor of modern Greek philology and director of the Institute *Néo-hellenique la Sorbonne*.

(3) Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975): Influential Russian philosopher, literary critic, and semiotician, known for his work on ethics and the philosophy of language.

PART XI:

EMOTIONS AND THE SENSES

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

EMOTIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Exchange as an Emotional Expression

The studies by Du Boulay, Zemon-Davis, Lindenbaum, and Wolf emphasized the separateness and discontinuity between genders through binary oppositions and rites of inversion. In her study, Weiner also assumed the existence of separate male–female social spheres, but in addition, she showed their levels of reciprocity. The separateness of the genders was mediated by formal systems of exchange that were not purely instrumental or obligatory performances. Rather, the act of exchange and the objects exchanged embodied subjective emotions that enabled communication.

Objects, in terms of quality, quantity, and category, could be read as objectifications of desire and intent. Thus, according to Weiner, any system of exchange also required a system of interpretation that was concerned with what was communicated. She pointed out that exchange had its political dimensions. Given the ethic of personal autonomy that governed their life, the **Trobriands** believed that they could indirectly influence the behavior of the other through exchange. (Trobriand society had no coercive mechanisms to undertake this, e.g., laws or guns.) Exchange was not coercive; it was voluntary. Thus, exchange both mediated the opposition between self and other and simultaneously reinforced it. Exchange limited the relations of total dependence on others, for one could always cease exchanges or shift their direction. At the same time, it limited total autonomy from others, since the concept of self and emotional expression was dependent on exchange performances.

She contrasted exchange to magic. Magic was influencing the behavior of others through coercion and imposition, and its use was considered dangerous to social stability (although it did occur). Exchange was organized around objects, whereas magic was organized around language.

For the Trobriands, objects, goods, and material resources were constantly in circulation and movement. Although they appeared as elements of economic transactions, they were the integral parts of an elaborate system of nonverbal communication. Of course, social life did not only revolve around the exchange of objects, but also around the accumulation of goods that first, enabled a person to enter exchange relations and second, constituted evidence of being a recipient in exchange.

Magic was used to counterbalance the constraints of exchange, that is, to make people more dependent on others than they were through exchange, or to make oneself more autonomous from the social order than exchange permitted. Magic was not exchangeable. This relation between magic and exchange brought out the political aspect of exchange, since magic and exchange were two complementary but opposing systems of gaining control over others.

Weiner critiqued other theories that understood exchange as an immediate and synchronic performance. Exchange, she asserted, is a drawn-out process that occurs in time and is concerned with the cosmological renewal of society. Furthermore, exchange is a system that advances self-interest (there is no altruistic giving). Thus, in Weiner's line of thinking, exchange norms are rhetoric that disguises self-interest. All long-term social relations of the Trobriands involved a disguise of the actual character by the social rhetoric of exchange. Exchange was a form of persuading people. What was disguised, in exchange, was a fear of not being able to control others or a fear of conflict and overt confrontation or a fear of death that suspends exchange. The rhetoric of exchange was exposed at these moments of crises and, at the same time, these moments pointed to the necessity of exchange. Thus, for Weiner, exchange, like any other social system, has its moments of inversion, where reciprocity collapses and unilateral action takes over—in this case, in the form of magical language.

In her discussion of the contra-social role of death, one detects that the opposition of exchange/magic is, in fact, the opposition of the individual to the collectivity. Thus, death, in this logic, was destabilizing, because it was conceived of as biologically individual. The role of women was to mediate this crisis caused by death, the interruption of a unilateral action (death) of the cycles of exchange, by restoring exchange. The death event highlighted individual autonomy from the collective. This was counter-balanced by the giving away of all economic wealth to others; this reversed complete autonomy by highlighting interdependency. It also

demonstrated women's involvement in cyclical time as opposed to linear time, and it was dramatized by their concern with social renewal. Everybody agreed that social relations have an end. Like the individual, exchanges can end, but unlike the individual, exchanges can be renewed through the preservation of the *dala* identity (see Chapter 11).

She argued that all objects and acts involved in the cosmological renewal of the social order must be understood as important as economic wealth and social institutions such as kinship, which have a more material and immediately pragmatic character.

The cosmological renewal controlled by women was contrasted to men's control of sociopolitical phenomena. Because of the collective belief in cosmological order, secular politics did not exhaust the definition of power in that society. Therefore, Weiner talked about women's and men's power over different resources and aspects of the social order.

This formula was also encountered in the Comaroffs' discussion of the symbolic practices of the migrant workers who did not control socioeconomic institutions that dominated their life, although they did control the systems for symbolizing the experience of this domination (discussed in Chapter 9). Natalie Zemon-Davis also discussed rituals of inversion in a similar fashion (in Chapter 22).

In fact, these aspects may not be as foreign to our own society as we suppose. This is, perhaps, what the following study shows.

On Procreation Stories

Faye Ginsburg (1) (1987) studied abortion in the **United States** in the modern era. She demonstrated that the political ideology of pro-life (against abortion) and pro-choice (in favor of abortion rights) activists are both organized around narratives, or what she called *procreation stories*, which are life-cycle events. Political identity has been organized on the extraction of meaning from personal life-cycle events. This can be contrasted to political ideologies of the male domain, which are based on historical perspectives and myths or economic philosophies. Ginsburg claimed that pro-choice and pro-life activists are determined by the conjuncture of biological factors, i.e., the trajectory of women's sexual and reproductive experience over their life and outside-imposed historical events or moments that lead women to different interpretations of reproductive experiences.

Both pro-choice and pro-life positions have been similarly determined by this conjuncture (reproductive cycle and historical moment). The intervention of a particular historical moment of the reproductive cycle of a woman creates discontinuity between biographical experience and available cultural models for representing that experience. The one historical intervention that Ginsburg identified as being determining was the entry of large numbers of women into the labor market and the breaking of traditional marriage and family arrangements. This forced a redefinition or reaffirmation of mothering.

As Ginsburg argued, both pro-life and pro-choice activists naturalize their models of women's work, sexuality, and motherhood. In terms of their political ideologies, both groups have been motivated by the ethic of **nurturance** (physical and emotional care). This points to the similarity of the two groups in their political logic, despite their differences. For example, pro-choice women have been involved in the ethic of nurturance, but they want to generalize it to the social order, while detaching nurturance from women, childbearing, and domesticity. Similarly, pro-life activists wish to preserve nurturance, but from a different perspective.

She considers pro-life women who withdraw from the public sphere to be a threat to the ethic of nurturance, for they see nurturance as only surviving in the domestic sphere. Abortion, on the other hand, is a penetration of the domestic sphere by the ethics of the marketplace. The major component of this is that the marketplace disengages sexuality from motherhood.

For the pro-choice group, the official ideological myths of reproduction are contrasted by the social realities of the public sphere, whereas, for the pro-life group, this contradiction does not demand a reformation of reproductive ethics, but the construction of a defensive perimeter around the domestic space and sexuality that limits the penetration of marketplace.

This model that Ginsburg offered conforms to David Schneider's polarity between descent, blood kin, and the marketplace of exchange (see Chapter 10).

Finally, she pointed out that the different procreation narratives of pro-choice and pro-life activists have been dependent on a mythical other for their coherence. Thus, an anthropological analysis that shows the common ethics, such as nurturance and other political logic that unites these narratives, undermines their opposition. Simply, it shows reciprocity.

Concluding, this discussion on nurturance can be connected with *exchange*: both groups oppose economic exchange to nurturance. Their own narrative constructions of identity are based on a reciprocal exchange in which they stereotype each other.

Exchanging Verses

Let us now return to the Mediterranean with Lila Abu-Lughod's (2) study of emotions in a Bedouin society in the Western desert of **Egypt,** near Libya.

Abu-Lughod (1986) distinguished between an ideological system and moral systems. By the former, she was referring to the official norms and codes collectively held by society. By moral systems, she meant a) the putting of ideological codes into practice and b) the other moralities that coexist with the official ideological code and are observable in day-to-day instruction. In these moral systems, she located the discourse on emotions in Bedouin society.

Thus, emotions in that culture had an unofficial status; they were more accessible in everyday practice and were associated with one gender more than the other. This is a marked difference from the Trobriand islanders in Weiner's study; they embodied emotions and desires in formal and official performances of exchange. Insofar as emotions were invested in exchange, they were part of the official ideology of the Trobriands. But given the fact that emotions were disguised as objects and desires in reciprocal exchanges, they could have had a covert impact in Trobriand life. They were, thus, both official and unofficial. Unlike the Bedouins in Abu Lughod's study, the Trobriands did not display a strong division between the emotive and the nonemotive.

If women in the Trobriands exchanged symbolic objects invested with emotions, women in the Bedouin society exchanged condensed poetic verses that, on the surface, might appear stereotypic and formulaic, but in fact, carried strong emotional messages for those hearing the poetry and were familiar with the personal context of the poet.

Abu Lughod asserted that women held conversations, through the exchange of poetic verses, in which they revealed emotions that could not be revealed to their men or in public life. Poetry itself tended to use familiar and ordinary images and did not necessarily involve original metaphors, because their meaning lay in what they connoted, and not in what they explicitly named (denoted). A poem connoted two things: a) other poetry and b) the life crises of the poet—which were never described explicitly in the poem.

Since verses were used repeatedly, there was no singular meaning to a particular poem or image. Rather, the meaning was determined and

changed by the listener's knowledge of the emotional background of the composer. A similar situation was prevalent with the Trobriands, as everybody exchanged the same stereotypic object, yams or skirts, but the meaning of the exchanged object and its value derived from the person doing the exchange. This led Weiner to assert that no object was ever detachable from its original owner, maker, or giver.

In the Bedouins, the self was constructed and expressed through poetic language. Three terms were used to refer to the self, and they were physical parts of the metaphorized body. They were nouns that allowed people to refer to themselves in the third person, indirectly. One such noun was the *eye*. The eye stood for the self, and it could also mean the beloved other as in the English phrase the apple of my eye. Another noun was the *mind* or *psyche*, which was physically located in the heart—although Westerners place it in the head and brain. A third term referred to the heart. The first heart dealt with thought processes, and the second one dealt with emotions. These metaphors allowed the poet to speak indirectly about the self in the third person—which is in keeping with the highly coded and cryptic character of the poems.

The detachment of the parts from the whole (i.e., eye, mind, and heart from the entire body) metaphorized the detachment of the self in and by language. Thus, except for the songs sung during weddings and circumcision, the sentiments were usually negative. The person who was happy was a silent person in that culture. Only the unhappy composed poetry. In this sense, the poetry was used therapeutically. The primary themes in the poetry were gender relations. The poetry was used to punctuate prose conversations in everyday life.

Abu Lughod understood this poetry as a covert form of resistance, because it was poetry of intimacy, of private spaces, informal social encounters, and women. All of these elements were excluded from public social life and the domain of men.

■

Furthermore, Abu-Lughod identified more than one discourse: there were also prose and poetry, men's and women's, formal and informal, and public and private discourses. This meant that a multiplicity of values and views were applied to the same situation. No one discourse, no matter how official or dominant or coercive, provided an exhaustive perspective on society.

This is what links Abu Lughod's perspective and analysis with the analyses of the Comaroffs, Weiner, Zemon-Davis, and Seremetakis. As discussed in previous chapters, the Comaroffs focused on official and unofficial discourses, Weiner on magic and exchange, and men and women, Zemon-Davis on inversion and normal reality, and Seremetakis on the relation between the anthropologist and photographer, and men and women (in "The Eye of the Other").

More specifically, Abu Lughod distinguished between two discourses: the discourse on ordinary life and the discourse on loss. The former (which was of the public domain) referred to the accumulation of status and preservation of honor, and it denied and stigmatized loss and discrimination. For instance, the discourse on ordinary life stressed indifference, personal autonomy from others, and denial of concern. In contrast, the discourse on loss expressed vulnerability, dependency, devastating sadness, self-pity, and a sense of betrayal. The discourse on ordinary life pertained to the detachment of self, whereas the discourse on loss pertained to the attachment of self to others. These, in turn, were divided into male/female and public/private classifications. However, this does not mean that women did not engage in the discourse of ordinary life. They engaged in this discourse when they were in public spaces among males and other women. But when in the private domains and in the absence of males, women engaged in the discourse on loss. Men would also engage in the discourse on loss within the private domain, but not as frequently.

The discourse on ordinary life was centered on honor for men and modesty for women. Honor dealt with the visibility of men in public life and their status, while modesty was based on concealment (and the distancing of women's sexuality in public life). The latter was expressed in the wearing of the veil. Thus, for women, the differences between the two discourses, on ordinary life and on loss, could be reduced to the concealment of the self in public and the exposure of the self that occurred in poetry.

In situations of loss, there were two types of mourning discourses: On the one hand, in everyday language and behavior, people reacted to death by anger and by blaming others for causing death (for instance by witchcraft). This precipitated revenge and feuding. In poetry, on the other hand, the discourse on death and violence was directed toward the self. Yet, officially, there were death laments that were closer to private poetry in expressing loss and vulnerability than they were to public discourses of

anger and blame. The laments, chanted by women, were known as "crying."

In conclusion, Abu Lughod was cautious about accepting the thesis of the universality of emotions, precisely because different cultural forms carry different sets of sentiments and exclude others. No matter how universal the experience of loss and vulnerability may have been, for the Bedouins, it did not appear in the discourse of honor of ordinary life in the public domain. Different social domains segmented emotions. Those domains had hierarchical status over others. They were linked to categories of people who also had hierarchical status over other sets of people, and emotions that were linked to "lower" social domains.

■

Around the same time, Catharine Lutz (3) (1986), in her pioneering study of emotions in anthropology, stood explicitly against the ethnocentric idea that emotions are universal. As she stated,

> the cultural meaning system that constitutes the concept of emotion has been invisible because we have assumed that it is possible to identify the essence of emotion, that the emotions are universal, and that they are separable from both their personal and social contexts…We…import a variety of western value orientations towards emotions (as good or bad things to have in particular quantities, shapes, and sizes) whenever we use that concept without alerting the reader to the attitudes toward it that have developed in the West...The contrast [of emotions] to rationality and thought is currently by far the more dominant and common use of the concept. (Lutz 1986, pp. 288-289)

Emotions and the Self: Universalism, Particularism, and Nonsynchronicity

Among the universalist theorists on emotions, one must identify the anthropologists Fred Myers (4), Renato Rosaldo, and Loring Danforth (the latter two were discussed earlier in the book).

Fred Myers, in one of his early studies on the Pintupi (**Aboriginal Australia**), entitled "Emotions and the Self" (1979), chose to explore the aborigines' concepts of emotions. Myers was not interested in describing the aborigines' emotions, for a direct observation of emotions would be the focus of a psychologist. Emotions must be accessed through another medium. For Abu Lughod, for instance, the medium was poetry or language. Myers too, chose language and vocabulary as a primary medium of emotions. Cultures select, emphasize, and elaborate on particular types, aspects, and qualities of emotions.

His main thesis was that, when the Pintupi talked of emotions, they were exploring the hidden motivations of other people. Concepts about emotions were tied to the self-awareness people had of their social order. Thus, emotions were self-reflexive media that give us an entry into people's subjective experience of their society. The way we represent our feelings allows us to construct certain expectations about emotions (what they do and mean) and about the correct and incorrect social situations that they are or are not associated with. Therefore, the systematic representation of emotions, which is socioculturally instituted, allows people to inscribe a meaning to sensation. This is a self-reflexive process for them, as well.

The language of emotions mediates between the norm, formal social rules and motivations, and personal desires. Myers described the language of emotional representation as a compromise that permits negotiation between personal motivation and institutional norm. The language of emotional representation is a political system by which people compare and evaluate personal needs in reference to institutional requirements. Thus, the first principle of Pintupi emotions was that emotions were not primarily introspective views of personal feeling. Rather, they looked outward and in relation to others. In this sense, it was often difficult to discern whether one was dealing with a person who was genuinely angry or a cultural performance where the person was expected to display anger in that situation.

Because of the centrality of kin relations, all emotional terms tended to refer to the interdependency of self and other. Kin terms evoked specific emotional associations, and they elicited emotional expectations about others—how you should feel about them and how they should feel about you. Children, for example, did not possess an emotional life, because they were not aware of others (they were narcissistic); their sense of self was not mediated by others. Therefore, children were characterized as oblivious, unaware, or deaf. Deaf was also applied to the insane. To be insane or deaf was to not be in touch with reality, meaning to be out of contact with one's kin.

The concepts of thinking, understanding, and hearing were expressed by the same word. To be thoughtful and to understand meant to listen to others. Myers called this a folk theory of motivation (it teaches one how to understand others) and a morality.

Personal identity was always identity as an extension of the self in relation to kin, objects (possessions received from kin), and places. The self was not limited to the physical individual. This concept of the self was also tied to their concept of happiness. One was not happy alone, but among others. In general, for the Pintupi, all positive emotional states were associated with a social connection with other people or objects associated with other people (the same case we found in the Trobriands), and all negative emotions were linked to isolation and a separation of the individual from others. In short, all emotional states were linked to a social condition.

In conclusion, the Pintupi society directly contrasts the Bedouin society (discussed by Abu Lughod), where official ideology emphasized autonomy and devalued interdependency. In the Pintupi society, autonomy came from outside the individual and was not a product of private will. For example, to execute someone who committed a crime was to detach yourself from that person, to become autonomous. And this could not be a subjective choice. It was the law that commended people to do this. If left to them, they would never kill the person, even if he/she stole from them or committed a crime. The Pintupi law compensated for the pervasive emotional interdependency between self and others by defining when, where, and how people detach themselves from others. The law was called *the dreaming* (meaning that one gets it in the dreams). Human decision-making processes did not generate a social consensus. A social consensus was maintained by an external autonomous code—the "dreaming" or "plan of life." Thus, law did not have a human origin, and as such, it did not have a human control. It could not be subjected to personal interest,

and it always reinforced collective interest. When people turned to dreams, they did not make a personal decision, but conformed to an outside authority. A man had political authority insofar as he represented the dreaming. Motivation had to be collectively, rather than individually, inspired.

If, for the Pintupi, emotions inscribed the individual into culture, for the Ilongot (in Rosaldo's study), in contrast, emotions were the individual's escape from culture, while, for the Bedouins (in Abu Lughod's study), it was emotions that allowed people to separate themselves from one cultural domain and enter another.

Because of his orientation (to language), Myers distinguished between the representation of emotions and personal sensation. He claimed that most anthropologists focused on the representation of emotions, because this would give them the social connotations or social structure of emotions.

A critical reading of the theoretical implications of Myers' model would focus on the split between representation and personal sensation. It echoes another version of the opposition between society or the collective and the individual. We all experience emotions but, once we insert our emotions into public, collective channels of communication like language, our emotions are not purely personal—they become socially mediated. Even the fact that we think about emotions by using a particular linguistic structure or grammar implies that society intervenes between the self and the direct experience of emotions.

■

Rosaldo, in his turn, asserted that death is a universal biological experience, like many others, that people mediate. Dissatisfied with the prevalent formalism and particularism of neo-Durkheimian studies of mortuary rites, he claimed that all practices that mediate or objectify these rock bottom experiences are analytically reducible to the a priori dimensions of individual biology and emotions. He asserted that this reduction should move ethnographic analysis to focus on the individual experience (Rosaldo 1984, pp. 191-192).

Yet, by separating the individual rage and mourning from the collective ritual process, the ceremonial, he preserved the Durkheimian opposition between the individual and the collective, the foundation of those treatments of death he set out to critique. Furthermore, by theorizing a

rock-bottom, precultural, biological–affective determination of subjectivity, he substituted the classic nature/culture opposition with a culture/emotions polarity. This, in turn, replicated the polarity between the individual and the collective.

Along the same lines and anticipating Rosaldo's objection to the particularistic treatments of mourning, Danforth (discussed in Chapter 7) focused on "the core of a universal cultural code" (Danforth 1982, p. 6). For Danforth, the experience of death occurs in a state of sociocultural liminality, in which the affected individuals become momentarily detached from collective structures. In this sense, this becomes a moment of cross-cultural connection (between anthropologist and "native," both removed from their respective collectivities), a moment in which "superficial cultural divisions are overcome" (Danforth 1982, p. 6).

Both theorists inserted a universal humanism into the death experience. This stands in contrast to the Durkheimian theory that localized death in a specific culture, yet as a determined component of an overarching social organization. In this model, "death becomes figurative, part of a rhetoric: to talk about death is to *really talk* about kinship, inheritance, the fertility of women, the social power of men" (Seremetakis 1991, p. 13). The question arises whether death is voided of any indigenous content. Is death an empty stage for a variety of other social dramas? As we discussed earlier, Block and Parry, as well as Huntington and Metcalf, focused on the conjuncture between social structures and the metaphors of fertility, infertility, uncontrolled sexuality, and regeneration, and they treated death as a passive repository of economic and/or reproductive norms.

On the other hand, Philippe Ariès' historical study on death rites in **premodern and early modern Europe** stands as a critique of these synchronic studies in which death rites have been treated as appendages of other sociocultural institutions. Ariès (1981), following Fernand Braudel's paradigm of the *longue durée,* treated death rites as deep structure. He, thus, inverted the customary Durkheimian treatment of death, in which death is the eccentric event and the social structure is the epitome of permanence and regulation. He demonstrated that belief systems and performances organized around death are not synchronous with other cultural codes and values. The thesis of **nonsynchronicity** (also encountered in Chapters 15 and 18) between death rituals and other social institutions allows us to treat death rites as an arena of social contestation in processes of social transformation, as a space where heterogeneous, antagonistic cultural codes and social interests meet. Seremetakis has

further asserted that "the institutions of death function as a critical vantage point from which to view society" (Seremetakis 1991, p. 15).

Death and emotions, particularly pain, seem to have suffered the same fate in the anthropological literature: they were categorized as private, individual experiences, and/or as causes of the suspension or temporary inversion of an enduring and homeostatic social structure and order. This is a steam valve model that depicts the expression of pain as a cathartic release. Seremetakis moved beyond this inversion model of pain and toward a consideration of the politics and historiography of pain. The key concept that enabled this transition was the politicization of pain in local communities, as expressed in the women's discourse on death and memory in the **Peloponnese**. Also, by linking pain to the anthropology of emotions, she got access to the bodily discursive organization of pain. The latter was not a momentary rupture, but a reproducible point of view that incessantly defamiliarized the social construction of reality. In modern Greek culture, and over several historical epochs, there has been an intimate relation between the gendered experience of pain and the process of historicization.

This is also attested to in her recent study on social memory in modern urban Greece, "*Death Drives in the City; or, On a Third Stream Anamnesis*" (2016), which documents emerging forms of social memory in the urban streets in the present era of socioeconomic crisis.

Her linking of emotions and material culture has been credited for having "registered methodological advances in the anthropology of the body comparable to Julia Kristeva's (5) theory of abjection" (6).

In conclusion, the growing interest in the body, and the connection between emotions and the senses, that we witnessed in the 1990s, led also to the "affective turn" in Anthropology and the Humanities—the concept of affect soon became a centerpiece in research and interpretation. A recent example of this turn is Hirschkind's (2006) work on sound, affect and emotion in what he called "Islamic counterpublics" in **Egypt**. He documented a new media form, the cassette sermon, by which Islamic ethical traditions have been reformulated in a modern political and technological order to promote the sensibilities and affects of pious living.

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Notes

(1) Faye Ginsburg: American cultural anthropologist, known for her work in visual media and gender studies. Professor at New York University.

(2) Lila Abu-Lughod: American cultural anthropologist and specialist in the Arab world. Professor of anthropology and women's-gender studies at Columbia University.

(3) Catharine Lutz: Cultural anthropologist, known for her work on emotions. She conducted research in Asia-Pacific and the US. Professor of anthropology and international relations at Brown University (Rhode Island, USA).

(4) Fred Myers: American cultural anthropologist. Conducted fieldwork in Aboriginal Australia (Western Desert Aborigines). Professor at New York University.

(5) Julia Kristeva: Bulgarian-French philosopher, influential in international critical analysis, cultural studies, and feminism. Her works addressed "abjection," "intertextuality," and "the semiotic" in the fields of linguistics, literary theory, psychoanalysis, art history, and biography. Professor at the University Paris Diderot. Recipient of the Hannah Arendt Prize for political thought, among other distinctions. The founding head of the Simone de Beauvoir Prize committee.

(6) See *Biographical Dictionary of Social and Cultural Anthropology,* Veret Amit, ed. London & New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 458. See also *American Ethnologist*, vol. 20, no. 3, Aug. 1993, pp. 640-41.

(7) Charles Hirschkind: American cultural anthropologist. Professor, University of California-Berkeley.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

ON THE SENSES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Drawing on her ethnographic studies in Greece, Seremetakis (1991, 1996) has argued that there is no split between experience and representation and has extended further the existing approaches on emotions by showing the interconnectedness of emotions and the senses. In Greek culture,

> A strong 'aesthima' [emotion feeling] is called pathos (passion). This includes the sense of suffering, illness, but also the English sense of passion, as in 'he has a passion for music.' The stem verb 'patheno' means I provoke passion in both its meanings; I am acting, moving by an internal forceful aesthima, passion; I get inspired, excited; I suffer. Among Greek youth, the word 'patheno' as in 'when I hear this song patheno,' is common. The gestures accompanying it, such as hitting and holding the forehead, and the matching sounds express both (sudden) suffering and extreme enjoyment.
>
> A synonym of patheno in this case is 'petheno,' I die. Pathos (passion) is the meeting point of eros and thanatos; where the latter is an internal death, the death of the self because of and for the other; the moment that the self is both the self and a memory in the other. Death is a journey; a sensorial journey into the other. So is eros. The common expression during love-making is 'me pethanes' (you made me die, I die because of, for you and through you). Eros is desire. It also means appetite. The expression often used in vernacular Greek, e.g., from mother to child, to show extreme desire is 'I'll eat you.' The same expression is used for someone causing suffering, e.g., child to parent, 'you ate me.' In the journey of death, to the otherworld, the earth 'eats' the body.
>
> In these semantic currents we find no clear-cut boundaries between the senses and emotions, the mind and body, pleasure and pain, the voluntary and the involuntary, and affective and aesthetic experience." (Seremetakis 1996, p. 5)

Passion, thus, is not an instantaneous thing, something one acquires naturally or something that is triggered on the spot. It is a pool of feelings, created and cultivated over long periods and cycles of exchanges—exchanges of visible and invisible signs (pumping out of body parts), readings, and interpretations. It is an "archeology of feeling."

Passion is both mute and externalized. Both codes coexist. Passion requires a space of silence, only to burst out. This silent or mute spot is but an extension of the externalized voice. (This view counters the argument of rock bottom pre-cultural emotions or experience versus culturally constructed behavior or performance.)

■

Anthropology's interest in the working of the senses, however, has a long history. It was Stoller's (1989, 1997) pioneering work on the senses that set the groundwork for a **multisensorial** anthropology. Cultural anthropologist Paul Stoller (1) built on the work of the historian Alain Corbin (2), who reintroduced smell into the historiography of everyday life, and on Susan Buck-Morss' work (3) on Walter Benjamin's (4) Arcades project. In his study of sorcery in the Songhay of **Niger**, Stoller showed how people think in a medium other than verbal or visual. He, thus, called into question western metaphysics and the epistemology of rationalism and scientism, which has resulted in a visual reductionism. Furthermore, he drove the ethnographer's attention to the independent force of the media, via which, ethnographic information is collected in the field. This idea was developed by Seremetakis (1996, 2009) with her discussion of **the involuntary circuit of the senses.** In Greek culture, the sense organs can exchange with each other, independently from the volition of the self. As the saying goes, "his eyes betrayed him," or "I saw it in his eyes" (despite his talk), meaning that, although his speech may have attempted to lie, "his eyes revealed the truth" to my eyes. Thus, the interpretation of and through the senses becomes a recovery of truth as a collective, material experience.

Michael Taussig (1993), who also dealt with an anthropological territory that decenters both scientistic perspectives and conventional representations of the other, the territory of ritual, magic, and divination, showed that human perception is fundamentally sensuous and mimetic. He discussed the curing figurines in the Cuna Indian's healing rites (in **San Blas, Panama**). By building on Benjamin's idea of the perceptual shock, Michael Taussig (5) linked sensuous perception to **the power of mimesis**, the capacity to copy perceived reality, and its relationship to socially

constructing otherness. As Stoller (1997) commented, miming something entails contact, touch. We copy the world to comprehend it through our body. Thus, copying a thing is electroshocking. But the experiencing of electroshock, of a "second contact," is a shocking disruption "to the neat and tidy categories of European conceptual hegemony" (Stoller 1997, p. 69). For cultural anthropologist Michael Taussig,

> to become aware of the West in the eyes and handiwork of its Others,…is to abandon border logistics and enter into the 'second contact' era of the borderland where 'us' and 'them' lose their polarity and swim in and out of focus (Taussig 1993, p. 247).

This critical discourse on the **Eurocentrism of the sensory** was extended by Allen Feldman (6) (1996) in his discussion of *cultural anaesthesia:* "The banishment of disconcerting, discordant and anarchic sensory presences and agents that undermine the normalizing and often silent premises of everyday life" (Feldman 1996, p. 89).

In combination with his discussion of the consequent stratification of the communicability of sensory experience by race, class, gender, and ethnicity within formations of power, Feldman has developed a political anthropology of the senses (Feldman 2006). Earlier, Lisa Law (2001) had shown the interplay of smell, space, and race in the context of global postcolonial labor in her study of Filipino domestic workers in urban Hong Kong. These women congregated in the underpasses of the city to re-create the smells and tastes of "home" by cooking, thus, transforming the surrounding, alienating urban and labor spaces into place.

David Howes (1991), in his turn, responded to Clifford's call for a *dialogical anthropology* by stressing the missing sensory dimension in the ethnographic encounter. James Clifford (1986) claimed that cultural poetics would allow an ethnographic interplay of voices, of positioned utterances, away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (see Chapter 2). Yet, as Howes interjected, this shift from the ocular to the oral must be accompanied by a further shift to the interplay of the senses.

David Howes' (7) call for multisensoriality was followed by several other cultural anthropologists, including Steven Feld (8), Stephen Tyler (9), and Michael Jackson (10), who authored significant ethnographic studies. However, all four were also influenced by Marshall McLuhan's (11) idea that cultures consist of contrasting "ratios of the senses." Howes (2003), drawing on the Melanesian cultures, claimed that all cultures organize the

senses hierarchically; thus, we simply have to consider the sensory order of the culture under study. Yet, a good bit of the sensory turn in ethnography took the form of recourse to literary, poeticized prose, rather than the recuperation of regional ontologies and existentials of the sensory. The sensory dimension in the new ethnography of science laboratories and biomedicine has tended to focus on objectified categories, rather than sensorial dimensions.

Several scholars have critiqued the idea of **sensory ratios**. Sarah Pink (12) (2009), for instance, claimed that, although Howes acknowledged the importance of perception, he called for a focus on cultural models; he, thus, shifted attention away from the individuals' practices and experiences. Seremetakis (1996) had also critiqued sensory ratios much earlier. The notion of ratios, as she claimed, presumes five originary, discrete senses; it also accommodates situations in which other senses may be tacked on. This may facilitate comparativity, but the numerical concept assumes a specialization of the senses and a literality of sensory capacities through the notion of an a priori divisibility of the material experience (as in Tyler 1988). She then proceeded to present a different perspective to that of multisensoriality:

> Enumerated sensory capacities and the corresponding segmentation of material experience into specialized semantic domains freezes the actual fluidity of cultural crossing and mutual "metaphorization of one sense by another," which can be encountered in the Greek culture, among others. (Seremetakis 1996, p. 126)

Seremetakis, thus, pushed the idea of multisensoriality to a new direction with her thesis of *the transcription and translation across the senses,* as driven by her ethnographic encounters.

Furthermore, by moving away from the Platonic-Aristotelian perspectives, which hierarchize the senses and give primacy to the visual, and adopting, instead, the dialogical performance of Greek tragedy and the tragic poets, Seremetakis (1991; 1994; 2009) demonstrated that perception, memory, and emotions cannot be disentangled from each other and from the senses. In Greek, there is a semantic circuit that weds the sensorial to agency, memory, finitude, and, therefore, history. The senses are constructed and reconstructed according to shifting historical situations, and sensory reorganization does not only occur by the imposition of new sensory hierarchies, but also through the way a society is allowed to talk about the senses. This talk must be understood in its widest sense of narration,

which includes not only language, but the talking objects of the signifying material culture. Sensory memory is encapsulated and stored in artifacts, spaces, and the temporalities of both "making and imagining," of sharing and exchange. ***Poesis* (poetry) is both making and imagining** in Greek culture. And the primacy of touch has been revealed since Diotima's response to Socrates:

> Any action which is the cause of something to emerge from nonexistence to existence is poesis; thus, all craft works are kinds of poesis, and their creators are all poets.... Yet, they are not called, as you know, poets, but have different names…. (Plato *Symposium)*

Seremetakis (1996, 1991) related this to modern Greek women's practices and experiences, such as embroidering and the (re)ordering of "relics." Women embroider series and sequences that cohere into a visual, tactile story. It is their form of writing spread on cloths, with ornaments and names, people and spaces, within and beyond the household.

Likewise,

> Bones at exhumation become tangible emotive substitutes of the absent flesh. The grave's contents being "burnt" by time and humidity historicize the bones from the perceptual angle of the present. Burning is the solidification of the senses of the exhumer onto the affective object. The exhumer, by hand collecting and ordering the bones, creates the 'second body' of the dead. Adornment and ornamentation, cleaning, ordering, divination, and narration of the bones generate tangible emotions. The clean bones are tangible memory, a fossil held in the palm. (Seremetakis 1991, pp. 187-189)

This integration of the senses with material culture has methodologically influenced recent symbolic and cognitive archaeology. (13)

Finally, multisensoriality has also been pushed in a new political direction by Michael Taussig (1987), who brought together technology, power, and post-colonial studies and pioneered the ethnography of embodied violence. These issues were later taken on and developed further by a number of anthropologists who focused on medical, political, and urban subjects of study.

As the interest in the senses continues, a special focus on touch has been developing in our era of technology. This is due to the following facts:

touch remains a puzzle for both the science of touch and the new technology; it has no presence in communication technologies; haptic interface technology in comparison to visual-audio technology is lagging behind; and mechanical reproduction of touch is still a challenge. Anthropologists working in these areas recognize that, in western modernity, sensory experience is stored in and exclusively narrated by scientific, legalistic and medicalized discourses, all modes of realism. Therefore, as Crary (14) (1990) has argued, all prosthetic instruments that aspire to extend the senses in modernity, such as camera obscura, do not exist independently from, and must therefore be understood in, their given social and political contexts in which they are produced and deployed.

In conclusion, the above studies on the senses, like all studies, to be understood and better appreciated, must be situated in the wider context in which they emerged and developed, in the rich and contentious spheres of political, theoretical, and cultural debates that have characterized cultural anthropology from its birth, all the way through the critical decades of the 1980s and 1990s, to date, in its birthplaces and far beyond.

■

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Notes

(1) Paul Stoller: A cultural anthropologist and writer, dedicated to ethnographic research for 30 years. Well known for his pioneering studies in the anthropology of the senses. Has conducted fieldwork in West Africa (Republics of Niger and Mali) and, recently, New York. Professor at Westchester University (USA).

(2) Alain Corbin: A French historian who was trained at the Annales School. A specialist in 19th century France and microhistory, in general. Well known for his work (in the English translation) *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (1988).

(3) Susan Buck-Morss: American philosopher and intellectual historian, best known for her work on Walter Benjamin. Professor of political sciences at the City University of New York Graduate Center, and professor emeritus at Cornell University.

(4) Walter Benjamin (1892-1940): German-Jewish philosopher and cultural critic. His famous last work, *The Arcades Project*, about Parisian life in the 19th century, was a thousand pages long and was first published in 1982, after his death.

(5) Michael Taussig: Australia-born American cultural and medical anthropologist and critical theorist. A major contributor to anthropology of the senses and experimental ethnographic writing. Has conducted fieldwork in South America and Latin America. Professor at Columbia University and, previously, at New York University (Department of Performance Studies).

(6) Allen Feldman: Cultural and political anthropologist and critical theorist, best known for his influential work on violence. Has conducted fieldwork in Ireland, South Africa, and New York. Professor at New York University, Department of Media, Culture and Communication.

(7) David Howes: Cultural anthropologist and leading figure in the anthropology of the senses. Professor at Concordia University (Montreal-Canada).

(8) Steven Feld: Ethnomusicologist and cultural anthropologist, best known for his work among the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea. Professor of anthropology and music at the University of New Mexico.

(9) Stephen Tyler: Contemporary cultural anthropologist. Has conducted fieldwork in South Asia. Professor at Rice University (USA).

(10) Michael Jackson: New Zealand cultural anthropologist and poet, well known for his field research and studies among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone (W. Africa) and the Warlpiri and Kuku Yalangi in Australia. Professor of world religions at Harvard Divinity School.

(11) Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980): Canadian philosopher of communication theory. Professor at the University of Toronto (Canada).

(12) Sarah Pink: Contemporary social anthropologist, specializing in visual anthropology. Professor at RMIT University (Melbourne-Australia).

(13) See John Hamilakis, *Archaeology and the Senses* (2015).

John Hamilakis is a professor at Brown University (USA) and, previously, at the University of Southampton.

(14) Jonathan Crary: American art critic and Professor of Modern Art and Theory at Columbia University (New York).

AUTHOR INDEX