

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGY

Since the 1950s Anthropology has taken on different approaches and methods. There is a greater emphasis on interpretation and a widening of perspectives to include, for example, ecology and feminism. Moreover, the classical scientific model of collecting data and describing a culture in an 'objective' manner has received strong criticism from post-modernists.

SYMBOLIC AND INTERPRETIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

Symbolic anthropology studies the way people understand their surroundings, as well as the actions and utterances of the other members of their society. These interpretations form a shared cultural system of meaning shared among members of the same society. Symbolic anthropology studies symbols and the processes such as myth and ritual by which humans assign meanings to these symbols to address fundamental questions about human social life. According to Geertz, man is in need of symbolic "sources of illumination" to orient himself with respect to the system of meaning that is any particular culture. Turner states that symbols initiate social action and are "determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action". Geertz's position illustrates the interpretive approach to symbolic anthropology, while Turner's illustrates the symbolic approach.

Symbolic anthropology views culture as an independent system of meaning deciphered by interpreting key symbols and rituals. There are two major premises governing symbolic anthropology. The first is that "beliefs, however unintelligible, become comprehensible when understood as part of a cultural system of meaning". The second major premise is that actions are guided by interpretation, allowing symbolism to aid in interpreting ideal as well as material activities. Traditionally, symbolic anthropology has focused on religion, cosmology, ritual activity, and expressive customs such as mythology and the performing arts.

Symbolic anthropology can be divided into two major approaches. One is associated with Clifford Geertz and the University of Chicago and the other with Victor W. Turner at Cornell University. The major difference between the two schools lies in their respective influences. Geertz was influenced largely by the sociologist, Max Weber, and was concerned with the operations of "culture" rather than the ways in which symbols operate in the social process. Turner, influenced by Emile Durkheim, was concerned with the operations of "society" and the ways in which symbols operate within it.. Turner was much more interested in investigating whether symbols actually functioned within the social process the way symbolic anthropologists believed they did. Geertz focused much more on the ways in which symbols operate within culture, like how individuals "see, feel, and think about the world".

Thick Description is a term Geertz borrowed from the philosopher, Gilbert Ryle, to describe and define the aim of interpretive anthropology. He argues that social Anthropology is based on ethnography or the study of culture. Culture is based on the symbols that guide a community's behaviour. Symbols obtain meaning from the role which they play in the patterned behaviour of social life. Culture and behaviour cannot be studied separately because they are intertwined. By analyzing the whole of culture one develops a "thick description" which details the mental processes and reasoning of members of the culture. To illustrate thick description, Geertz uses Ryle's example which discusses the difference between a "blink" and a "wink." One, a blink, is an involuntary twitch, a „thin description“, and the other, a wink, is a conspiratorial signal to a friend, the **thick** description. While the physical movements involved in each are identical, each has a distinct meaning.

Hermeneutics is a term first applied to the critical interpretation of religious texts. The modern use of the term is a combination of empirical research and the subjective understanding of human phenomena. Geertz used hermeneutics in his studies of symbol

systems to try to understand the ways that people understand and act in social, religious, and economic contexts .

Social Drama is a concept devised by Victor Turner to study the dialectic of social transformation and continuity. A social drama is a spontaneous unit of social process and a fact of everyone's experience in every human society. Social dramas occur within a group that shares values and interests and has a shared common history. This drama can be broken into four acts. The first act is a rupture in social relations, or breach. The second act is a crisis that cannot be handled by normal strategies. The third act is a remedy to the initial problem, or redress and the re-establishment of social relations. The final act can occur in two ways: reintegration, the return to the status quo, or recognition of schism, an alteration in social arrangements.

Like many forms of cultural anthropology, symbolic anthropology is based on cross-cultural comparison. One of the major changes made by symbolic anthropology was the movement to a literary-based rather than a science-based approach. Symbolic anthropology utilized literature from outside the limits of traditional anthropology. In addition, symbolic anthropology examines symbols from different aspects of social life, rather than from one aspect at a time isolated from the rest. This is an attempt to show that a few central ideas expressed in symbols manifest themselves in different aspects of culture.

The major accomplishment of symbolic anthropology has been to turn anthropology towards issues of culture and interpretation rather than the development of grand theories. Geertz has become the most often cited anthropologist by other disciplines. The use of similar citations by Turner and others helped anthropology turn to sources outside the bounds of traditional anthropology, such as philosophy and sociology.

Geertz's main contribution to anthropological knowledge, however, was in changing the ways in which American anthropologists viewed culture, shifting the concern from the operations of culture to the way in which symbols act as vehicles of culture. Another contribution was the emphasis on studying culture from the perspective of the actors in that culture.

Turner's major addition to anthropology was the investigation of how symbols actually operate, whether they function the ways in which symbolic anthropologists say they do.

Symbolic anthropology has come under fire from several fronts, most notably from Marxists. They see a weakness in the interruption between external symbols and internal dispositions. This corresponds to the gap between "cultural system" and "social reality" when attempting to define the concept of religion in universal terms. Symbolic anthropologists replied to this attack by stating that Marxism reflected historically specific Western assumptions about material and economic needs. Thus it cannot be properly applied to non-Western societies.

IMPORTANT THINKERS

Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) studied at Harvard University in the 1950s. He was strongly influenced by Weber, adopting various aspects of his thinking as key elements in his interpretive anthropology, the results of which can be found in his compilation of essays entitled "The Interpretation of Cultures." He believed that an analysis of culture should not be an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. Culture is expressed by the external symbols that a society uses rather than being locked inside people's heads. He defined culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life". For Geertz symbols are "vehicles of 'culture'", meaning that symbols should be studied for what they can reveal about culture. Geertz's main interest was the way in which symbols shape the ways that social actors see, feel, and think about the world.

Victor Witter Turner (1920-1983) was the major figure in the other branch of symbolic anthropology. Born in Scotland, Turner was influenced early on by the structural-functional approach of British social anthropology. Turner was not interested in symbols as vehicles of "culture" as Geertz was but instead investigated symbols as "operators in the social process" believing that "the symbolic expression of shared meanings, not the attraction of material interests, lie at the center of human relationships." Symbols "instigate social action" and exert "determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action". Turner felt that these "operators," by their arrangement and context, produce "social transformations" which tie the people in a society to the society's norms, resolve conflict, and aid in changing the status of the actors.

ECOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Ecological anthropology focuses upon the complex relations between people and their environment. Human populations have contact with and impact upon the land, climate, plant, and animal species in their neighbourhoods and these elements of their environment have reciprocal impacts on humans. Ecological anthropology investigates the ways that a population shapes its environment and the subsequent manners in which these relations form the population's social, economic, and political life. Ecological anthropology attempts to provide a materialist explanation of human society and culture as products of adaptation to environmental conditions.

In reaction to Darwin's theory, some anthropologists turned to environmental determinism as a mechanism for explanation. The earliest attempts at environmental determinism mapped cultural features of human populations according to environmental information. The detailed ethnographic accounts of Boas, Malinowski, and others led to the realization that environmental determinism could not explain the observed realities and a weaker form of determinism began to emerge. Julian Steward coined the term "cultural ecology". He looked for the adaptive responses to similar environments that gave rise to cross-cultural similarities. Steward's theory centered around a culture core, which he defined as "the constellation of features which are most closely related to subsistence activities and economic arrangements".

A field such as ecological anthropology is particularly relevant to contemporary concerns with the state of the general environment. Anthropological knowledge has the potential to inform and instruct humans about how to construct sustainable ways of life. Anthropology, also demonstrates the importance of preserving cultural diversity. Biological diversity is necessary for the adaptation and survival of all species; culture diversity may serve a similar role for the human species because it is clearly one of our most important mechanisms of adaptation.

DISCUSSION

In the 1950s, dissatisfaction with existing vague and rigid theories of cultural change stimulated the adoption of an ecological perspective. This new perspective considers the role of the physical environment in cultural change in a more sophisticated manner than environmental determinism. Ecological anthropology is also a reaction to idealism, which is the idea that all objects in nature and experience are representations of the mind. It demonstrates a turn toward the study of the material conditions of the environment, which have the potential to affect ideas. Steward was also disillusioned with historical particularism and culture area approaches and so he emphasized environmental influences on culture and cultural evolution. Boas and his students had argued that cultures are unique and cannot be compared. In response, Steward's methodological approach to multilineal evolution called for a detailed comparison of a small number of cultures that were at the same level of sociocultural integration and in similar environments, but separated geographically by great distances.

During the 1960s, a shift in focus occurred in ecological anthropology because of changing trends and interactions within the global system. With increases in exchange, communication, and migration, it became increasingly difficult to apply the terms and concepts once developed under the study of ecological anthropology. In the decades following there was been a gradual adaptation of the discipline to focus not only on localized human and ecosystem interactions, but include global influences and how the global community affects how groups across the world interact with their ecosystems. As a result of the changes occurring in the general outlook of ecological anthropology, specialised fields within the discipline have emerged with researchers taking different approaches to studying the interaction of people and their ecosystems.

Carrying Capacity: the number of individuals that a habitat can support. This idea is related to population pressure, referring to the demands of a population on the resources of its ecosystem. If the technology of a group shifts, then the carrying capacity changes as well.

Cultural Ecology is the study of the adaptation of human societies or populations to their environments. Emphasis is on the arrangements of technique, economy, and social organization through which culture mediates the experience of the natural world.

Culture Core defined the cultural core as the features of a society that are the most closely related to subsistence activities and economic arrangements. This core includes political, religious, and social patterns that are connected to such arrangements.

Environmental Determinism is a deterministic approach which assigns one factor as the dominant influence in explanations. Environmental determinism is based on the assumption that cultural and natural areas are coterminous, because culture represents an adaptation to the particular environment. Therefore, environmental factors determine human social and cultural behaviors.

Limiting Factor. In the 1960s cultural ecology focused on showing how resources could be limiting factors. A limiting factor is a variable in a region that, despite the limits or settings of any other variable, will limit the carrying capacity of that region to a certain number.

Ecological anthropology has used a number of different methodologies during the course of its development. The methodology employed by cultural ecology, popular in the 1950s and early 1960s, involved the initial identification of the technology employed by populations in the use of environmental resources. Patterns of behavior relevant to the use of that technology were then defined in terms of the extent to which these behaviours affected other cultural characteristics.

Although more was learned about the intimate relationship of societies and their environment it has been argued that studies conducted as cultural ecology were limited to egalitarian societies. It is a theory and methodology used to explain how things stay the same, as opposed to how things can change. By the 1960s, many anthropologists had turned away from Steward's views and adopted the new idea that cultures could be involved in mutual interaction with the environment.

IMPORTANT THINKERS

Julian Steward (1902-1972) Steward developed the cultural ecology paradigm and introduced the idea of the culture core. Steward's theories are presently regarded as examples of specific and multilineal evolution, where cross-cultural regularities exist due to the presence of similar environments. Steward specified three steps in the investigation of the cultural ecology of a society: (1) describing the natural resources and the technology used to extract and process them; (2) outlining the social organization of work for these

subsistence and economic activities; (3) tracing the influence of these two phenomena on other aspects of culture.

CULTURAL MATERIALISM IN ANTHROPOLOGY

This should not be confused with the Cultural Materialism associated with Raymond Williams and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. This will be discussed in the final chapter of this work.

For anthropology it was used by Marvin Harris in his book, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. For Harris cultural materialism embraces three anthropological schools of thought, cultural materialism, cultural evolution and cultural ecology. It explains cultural similarities and differences as well as models for cultural change within a societal framework consisting of three distinct levels: infrastructure, structure and superstructure. Cultural materialism promotes the idea that infrastructure, consisting of “material realities” such as technological, economic and demographic factors influence the other two aspects of culture. The “structure” sector of culture consists of organizational aspects of culture such as domestic and kinship systems and political economy, while the “superstructure” sector consists of ideological and symbolic aspects of society such as religion. Cultural materialists believe that technological and economic aspects play the primary role in shaping a society. Cultural materialism aims to understand the effects of technological, economic and demographic factors on creating societal structure and superstructure through strictly scientific methods. Unlike Marxist theory, cultural materialism views both productive and demographic forces as the primary factors which shape society. It explains the structural features of a society in terms of production within an infrastructure only. Demographic, environmental, and technological changes are used to explain cultural variation. It addresses relations of unequal power recognizing innovations or changes that benefit both upper and lower classes. However, it does not have a vision of a final utopian form as visualized by Marxism.

Cultural Materialists believe that all societies operate according to a model in which production and reproduction dominate and determine the other sectors of culture, effectively serving as the driving forces behind all cultural development. They propose that all non-infrastructure aspects of society are created with the purpose of benefitting societal productive and reproductive capabilities. Therefore, systems such as government, religion, law, and kinship are considered to be constructs that only exist for the sole purpose of promoting production and reproduction.

As with other forms of materialism, cultural materialism emerged in the late 1960s as a reaction to cultural relativism and idealism. At the time, anthropological thought was dominated by theorists who located culture change in human systems of thought rather than in material conditions as with Durkheim and Levi-Strauss. Harris criticised idealist and relativist perspectives which claimed that comparisons between cultures are non-productive and irrelevant because each culture is a product of its own dynamics. He argued that these approaches remove culture from its material base and place it solely within the minds of its people. Harris stated that idealists and relativists fail to be holistic, violating a principle of anthropological research.

Superstructure. The superstructure is the symbolic or ideological segment of culture. Ideology consists of a code of social order regarding how social and political organization is structured. It structures the obligations and rights of all the members of society. The superstructure involves things such as ritual, taboos, and symbols.

Priority of Infrastructure. The main factor in determining whether a cultural innovation is selected by society lies in its effect on the basic biological needs of that society.

Cultural materialism focuses only on entities and events that are observable and quantifiable. In keeping with empirical scientific method, these events and entities must be studied using operations that can be replicated. Using empirical methods, cultural materialists reduce cultural phenomena into observable, measurable variables that can be applied across societies to formulate theories.

A good example of cultural materialism at work involves the study of women's roles in the post-World War II United States. This was empirically studied and the findings interpreted according to a classic cultural materialist model. The 1950's was a time when ideology held that the duties of women should be located solely in the home. However, it was found empirically that women were entering the workforce in large numbers. This movement was an economic necessity that increased the productive and reproductive capabilities of U.S. households. Here we see how infrastructure determined superstructure as ideology changed to suit new infrastructural innovations.

Cultural materialism can be credited with challenging anthropology to use more scientific research methods. Rather than rely solely on native explanations of phenomenon, Harris and others urged analysts to use empirical and replicable methods.

Postmodernists have argued that cultural materialism because of its use of strict scientific method has biased results. They believe that empirical science is itself a culturally determined phenomenon that is affected by class, race and other structural and infrastructural variables.

IMPORTANT THINKERS

Marvin Harris (1927- 2001) was educated at Columbia University where he received his Ph.D. in 1953. In 1968, Harris wrote *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* in which he lays out the foundations of cultural materialism (CM) and considers other major anthropological theories.

FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY

Feminist Anthropology emerged as a reaction to what was felt as male bias within the discipline. However, some of the prominent figures in early American anthropology, for example, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, were women and the discipline has traditionally been more egalitarian, in terms of gender, than other social sciences. Underlying that statement, however, is the fact that the discipline has been subject to prevailing modes of thought through time and has certainly exhibited the kind of male-centred thinking of which early feminist anthropologists accused it.

There are three waves of feminist anthropology. The first wave, from 1850 to 1920, tried to include women's voices in ethnography. What little ethnographic data concerning women was often the reports of male informants transmitted through male ethnographers. The second wave, from 1920 to 1980, moved into academic spheres and separated the notion of sex from that of gender, both of which previously had been used interchangeably. Gender was used to refer to both the male and the female, the cultural construction of these categories, and the relationship between them. The definition of gender may vary from culture to culture and this understanding has led feminist anthropologists away from broad generalizations. In addition, second wave feminist anthropologists rejected the idea of inherent dichotomies such as male and female, work and home. Trends in research of this wave developed along a materialistic perspective. Marxist theories about social relations made research about women, reproduction, and production popular. Several of the scholars who follow this perspective focus on gender as it relates to class, the social relations of power, and changes in modes of production.

Contemporary feminist anthropologists constitute the theory's third wave, which began in the 1980s. Feminist anthropologists no longer focus solely on the issue of gender asymmetry, as this leads to neglect in fields of anthropology such as archaeology and physical anthropology. Instead, feminist anthropologists now acknowledge differences through

categories such as class, race, ethnicity, and so on. The focus of contemporary scholars in third wave feminist anthropology is on the differences existing among women rather than between males and females. However, this also encourages considerations of what categories such as age, occupation, religion, status, and so on mean and how they interact, moving away from the issue of male and female. Power is a critical component of feminist anthropology analysis, since it constructs and is constructed by identity.

Feminist anthropologists first reacted against the fact that the discussion of women in the anthropological literature had been restricted to the areas of marriage, kinship, and family. They believe that the failure of researchers in the past to treat the issues of women and gender as significant has led to a deficient understanding of the human experience. One criticism made by feminist anthropologists is directed towards the language being used within the discipline. The use of the word "man" is ambiguous, sometimes referring to *Homo sapiens* as a whole, sometimes in reference to males only, and sometimes in reference to both simultaneously.

Second wave feminist anthropologists reacted against Emile Durkheim's notion of a static system that can be broken down into inherent dichotomies. Instead, feminist anthropologists seek to show that the social system is dynamic. They base this dynamic theory on Marx's idea that social relations come down to praxis or practice. Post-structuralist feminist anthropologists also criticize the theory of cultural feminism as an essentialist view suggesting that there is a male and female essence that validates traditional roles of males and females. Feminist anthropologists argue that cultural feminism ignores the oppressive powers under which traditional values were created.

Queer theory is the most recent post-structuralist development as a result of feminist anthropology. It challenges the notion of "normalcy" and focuses on gender and sexuality. Specifically it challenges the assumption that heterosexuality and the resulting social institutions are the normative sociosexual structures in all societies. Queer theory questions the idea that gender is part of the essential self and that it is instead based upon the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities, which consist of many varied components.

Subordination of women. Initially, feminist anthropology focused on analysis and development of theory to explain the subordination of women, which seemed to be universal and cross-cultural. Several theories were developed to understand this idea, including Marxism and binary oppositions.

Marxism. Marxist theory appealed to feminist anthropologists in the 1970s because they felt that there is no theory which accounted for the oppression of women in its endless variety and monotonous similarity, cross-culturally and throughout history with anything like the explanatory power of the Marxist theory of class oppression.

Universal binary opposition. Feminist anthropologists used dichotomies such as public/domestic, production/reproduction and nature/culture to explain universal female subordination.

Domestic power of women. Although females are subjected to universal subordination, they are not without individual power. This concept emphasizes the domestic power of women. This power, according to this theoretical framework can be shown in individually negotiated relations based in the domestic sphere but influencing and even determining male activity in the public sphere.

Sex/Gender system. The use and development of the concept "gender" has helped to separate feminist anthropology from the use of dichotomies and the search for universals. Gender, as it came to replace the term woman in anthropological debate, helped to free the issue of inequality from biological connotations. These new discussions of gender brought with them more complex issues of cross-cultural translation, universality, the relationship

between thought systems and individual action, and between ideology and material conditions.

Identity. The focus on identity and difference has become important in feminist anthropology. Power is an important component of analysis since the construction and enactment of identity occurs through discourses and actions that are structured by contexts of power.

The unifying aspect of feminist anthropology is that it focuses on the role, status, and contributions of women to their societies. Within this framework, individual anthropologists explore a wide range of interests and employ a wide range of theoretical models to interpret data. It would, consequently, be problematic to characterize any one approach or model as predominant within the field at present. However, it should be noted that the field was more unified during its early development in the 1970s, when the interest was on developing models to explain the universal subordination of women.

The most obvious contribution of feminist anthropology has been the increased awareness of women within anthropology, both in terms of ethnographic accounts and theory. This emphasis has challenged a number of conventional beliefs, for instance concerning models of human origins wherein the "man the hunter" model was seen as being the driving force in human evolution, ignoring the role that women's productive and reproductive roles in the evolution of *Homo sapiens sapiens*.

An early criticism was made by female anthropologists belonging to ethnic minorities. Their criticism was that white, middle class female anthropologists were focusing too intensely on issues of gender. Consequently, they were ignoring social inequalities arising from issues such as racism and the unequal distribution of wealth. This criticism has been redressed both by a heightened awareness of such issues by these white, middle class feminist anthropologists, as well as the entry of large numbers of minority anthropologists into the field.

Finally, the field has always been intimately associated with the feminist movement and has often been politicized. This practice is problematic on a number of levels. It can alienate many from the field by projecting an atmosphere of radicalism. Moreover, putting politics before attempts at impartial inquiry tends to lead to research of questionable merit.

IMPORTANT THINKERS

Margaret Mead (1901-1978). She was a key figure in the second wave anthropology, for her work distinguished between sex and gender. Her theories were influenced by ideas borrowed from Gestalt psychology, that subfield of psychology which analyzed personality as an interrelated psychological pattern rather than a collection of separate elements. Her work separated the biological factors from the cultural factors that control human behavior and personality development.

Louise Lamphere (1940-): She worked along with Michelle Rosaldo to edit *Woman, Culture, and Society*. This was the first volume to address the anthropological study of gender and women's status.

Michelle Rosaldo (1944-1981): she offered an integrated set of explanations, each at a different level, for the universal subordination of women. These focused on social structure, culture, and socialization. She argued that in every society women bear and raise children and that women's socially and culturally defined role as mother provided the basis for subordination. Rosaldo argued that because women frequently participate in behaviours that limit them, one must perform an analysis of the larger system in order to understand gender inequality.

Gayle Rubin (1949-) An activist and influential theorist of sex and gender politics. She introduced the "sex/gender system," which distinguished biology from behavior in the same way Mead did with her work. She has written on a range of subjects including feminism, sadomasochism, prostitution, pedophilia, pornography and lesbian literature, as well as anthropological studies and histories of sexual subcultures, especially focused in urban contexts.

Lila Abu-Lughod (1952 -) She seeks to demonstrate that culture is boundless. In *Writing Women's Worlds*, she shared Bedouin women's stories and shows that they find advantages in a society which separates gender. Her works, like many others, dispel the misunderstandings many Western feminists have about Islam and Hinduism. She has written on a wide range of issues from gender politics to the politics of memory.

POSTMODERNISM IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS CRITICS

As an intellectual movement postmodernism was born as a challenge to several modernist themes that were first articulated during the Enlightenment. These include scientific positivism, the inevitability of human progress and the potential of human reason to address any essential truth of physical and social conditions and making them amenable to rational control. The primary tenets of the postmodern movement include: (1) an elevation of text and language as the fundamental phenomena of existence, (2) the application of literary analysis to all phenomena, (3) a questioning of reality and representation, (4) a critique of metanarratives, (5) an argument against method and evaluation, (6) a focus upon power relations and hegemony, (7) and a general critique of Western institutions and knowledge.

In the late 1970s and 1980s some anthropologists began to express elaborate self-doubt concerning the validity of fieldwork. By the mid-1980s the critique about how anthropologists interpreted and explained the Other, essentially how they engaged in "writing culture," had become a full-blown epistemological crisis often referred to as the "postmodern" turn. The driving force behind the postmodern turn was a deep scepticism about whether the investigator could adequately, effectively, or honestly integrate the context of investigation into the context of explanation and, as a result, write true social knowledge. This concern was most prevalent in cultural and linguistic anthropology, less so in archaeology, and had the least effect on physical anthropology, which is generally the most scientific of the four areas of anthropology.

The concept of culture as a whole was linked not only to modernism, but to evolutionary theory. In the postmodernist view, if "culture" existed it had to be totally relativistic without any suggestion of "progress." While postmodernists had a greater respect for later revisions of cultural theory by Franz Boas and his followers, who attempted to shift from a single path of human "culture" to many varied "cultures," they found even this unsatisfactory because it still required the use of a Western concept to define non-Western people.

The unrelenting re-examination of the nature of ethnography inevitably leads to a questioning of ethnography itself as a mode of cultural analysis. Postmodernism insists that anthropologists must consider the role of their own culture in the explanation of the "other" cultures being studied.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishments of postmodernism is the focus upon uncovering and criticizing the epistemological and ideological motivations in the social sciences, as well as the increased attention to the factors contributing to the production of knowledge.

The self-reflexive regard for the ways in which social knowledge is produced, as well as a general scepticism regarding the objectivity and authority of scientific knowledge, has led to an increased appreciation for the voice of the anthropological Other.

IMPORTANT THINKERS

Michael Agar is critical of traditional scholarly studies related to the social world for two reasons. Firstly, he feels that it is far too difficult to reconstruct human interactions based on notes in a meaningful way. Secondly, he feels that American anthropology tends to draw a barrier between “applied” and “practised” work.

Clifford Geertz (1926 - 2006) Geertz was a prominent anthropologist best known for his work with religion. He was somewhat ambivalent about Postmodernism. He divided it into two movements that both came to fruition in the 1980s. Geertz describes these as follows: The first led off into essentially literary matters: authorship, genre, style, narrative, metaphor, representation, discourse, fiction, figuration, persuasion; the second, into essentially political matters: the social foundations of anthropological authority, the modes of power inscribed in its practices, its ideological assumptions, its complicity with colonialism, racism, exploitation, and exoticism, its dependency on the master narratives of Westerns self-understanding.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1944 -) is a professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. She advocates that ethnographies be used as tools for critical reflection and human liberation because she feels that "ethics" make culture possible. Since culture is preceded by ethics, therefore ethics cannot be culturally bound as argued by anthropologists in the past.

Roy D'Andrade (1931-) examines postmodernism's definition of objectivity and subjectivity by examining the moral nature of their models. He argues that these moral models are purely subjective. D'Andrade argues that despite the fact that utterly value-free objectivity is impossible, it is the goal of the anthropologist to get as close as possible to that ideal. He argues that there must be a separation between moral and objective models because they are counterproductive in discovering how the world works. He takes issue with the postmodernist attack on objectivity. He states that objectivity is in no way dehumanizing nor is objectivity impossible.

Marshall Sahlins (1930 -)- Sahlins criticizes the postmodern preoccupation with power. Claiming that the current Foucaultian-Gramscian-Nietzschean obsession with power is the latest incarnation of anthropology's incurable functionalism.

Melford Spiro (1920 - 2014) Spiro is a defender of empirical scientific method. He argues that postmodern anthropologists do not convincingly dismiss the scientific method. Further, he suggests that if anthropology turns away from the scientific method then anthropology will become the study of meanings and not the discovery of causes that shape what it is to be human. Spiro specifically assaults the assumption that the disciplines that study humanity, like anthropology, cannot be "scientific" because subjectivity renders observers incapable of discovering truth. Spiro agrees with postmodernists that the social sciences require very different techniques for the study of humanity than do the natural sciences, but while insight and empathy are critical in the study of mind and culture, intellectual responsibility requires objective methods in the social sciences.

MAIN POINTS

- Symbolic and interpretive anthropology has shown Cultural Studies three important ways of analyzing culture, thick description, social drama and hermeneutics.
- Ecological anthropology has emphasized the relationship of human beings to their environment and thus the importance of cultural diversity.

- Cultural materialism in anthropology has highlighted the relationship between production, reproduction (the biological imperative) and the culture that is produced.
- Feminist anthropology has focused on the role of identity formation for women in a culture, challenged the male-centred accounts in analyzing how women are subordinated and challenged conventional accounts of the male/female dichotomy. The work of feminist anthropologists has enabled Cultural Studies to understand how much culture is constructed.
- Post-modernist anthropology has challenged the methods and procedures of conventional and scientific anthropology and reinforced the notion of culture as a conglomeration of constructs.

SEMINAR EXERCISES

- Form a small group with other members of the seminar and describe one significant item of body language for each member of the group. Analyze them in terms of „thin“ and "thick“ descriptions.
- Think of a recent "social drama“ among your family or friends. Describe it in terms of Turner's four acts.
- Discuss how far the concepts of ecological anthropology can be applied to modern European society, if possible referring to Great Britain.
- Identify some rituals, taboos and symbols in British culture which could be part of the superstructure of British society.
- Use one of these dichotomies, public/domestic, production/reproduction and nature/culture to explain an example of female subordination in contemporary society.
- Find an example of the "domestic power of women“ in contemporary society.
- How far are education systems a means of supporting the hegemony of power relations in contemporary society?

READING

Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. 1973. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Turner, Victor W. *Social Dramas and Stories about Them*. 1980. *Critical Inquiry* 7:141-168.

Ecological Anthropology

Steward, Julian. *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution*. 1955. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Cultural Materialism

Harris, Marvin. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*. 1968. New York: Crowell.

Margolis, Maxine L. *Mothers and Such: Views of American Women and Why They Changed*. 1984. California: University of California Press.

See also: <http://www.faculty.rsu.edu/users/f/felwell/www/Theorists/Harris/Index.htm>

Feminist Anthropology

Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. 1993. California: University of California Press.

Mead, Margaret. *Male and Female: A study of the sexes in a changing world*. 1949. New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks.

Rosaldo, Michelle and Louise Lamphere, eds. *Women, Culture, and Society*. 1974. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Rubin, Gayle. *The Traffic of Women: Notes on the "Political Economy of Sex."* In *Toward an Anthropology of Women* ed. Reither, Rayna. 1975. USA. Monthly Review Press

Post-Modernist Anthropology

Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. 1979. New York: Routledge.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. 1993. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tyler, Stephen. *Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult To Occult Document*. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. 1986. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Vattimo, Gianni (1988) *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*. 1988. London: Polity.

See on-line:

<http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php>

<http://www.studyanthropology.org/theory-of-anthropology>

<http://www.qvctc.commnet.edu/brian/theories.html>

<http://credoreference.libguides.com/content.php?pid=307806&sid=2521183>

http://www.zeepedia.com/read.php?major_theories_in_cultural_anthropology_diffusionism_cultural_anthropology&b=98&c=3