An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

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By

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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.