

Theories of Culture

Part 2

Modernity and ambiguity.

- Bauman: a fundamental failure of modernity to deal with ambiguities. From frontiers to borders (Giddens). Homogenization through erasure, silencing, marginalization, expulsion and annihilation.

Annett & Collins: gender and sexual stratification.

- Gender roles as constructed in the structurally determined competition over available resources with the use of dominant ideology.

Annett & Collins

- Repression of sexuality as the result of competition/cooperation between men and women: 'In the period of transition from the situation of patriarchal dominance to that of private households in a peaceful market economy, men's interests in controlling their women and women's interests in improving their position through an idealization of sexuality are likely to coincide in producing a maximal degree of puritanism.'

Giddens and "democratic sex."

- Democratic norms 'sever sexuality from...power, above all from the power of phallus. The democratisation implied in the transformation of intimacy includes, but also transcends, "radical pluralism." No limits are set upon sexual activity save for those entailed by the generalising of the principle of the autonomy and by the negotiated norms of the pure relationship. Sexual emancipation consists in integrating...sexuality with the reflexive project of self. Thus, for example, no prohibition is necessarily placed on episodic sexuality so long as the principle of autonomy, and other associated democratic norms, are sustained on all sides. On the other hand, where such sexuality is used as a mode of exploitative domination,...or where it expresses a compulsiveness, it falls short of the emancipatory ideal.'

Postmodernity: from disseminated to dissolved power.

- Postmodern power disappears from social relations or rather the whole social reality disappears and is replaced by hyperreality of "models, codes, information, and media." The dead, abstract power resides in hyperreality as simulacrum, that is as a sign which lost any connection with anything signified, and is reproduced through "media, consumption, fashion, leisure, and semiotics," not by any "real" strategies of "real" people trying to subordinate each other or liberate from subordination. Power is not "merely impossible to locate because of dissemination, but dissolved...and...made hyperreal through simulations." (Baudrillard)

Postmodern identities.

- Postmodern culture as implosion of difference, entropy and collapse of boundaries.
- The end of identity as a “solid project”: immortality dissolved into partial satisfactions and “life without project.” Destruction of future and linearity. Identity as something “here and now,” until further notice. Nothing is irreversible. Nothing disappears. Pilgrims vs. tourists (nomads). The return of the repressed or trivialization?

Nation according to nationalism.

- “Nation is a numerous and homogeneous population, permanently inhabiting and cultivating a coherent territory with a well-defined geographic outline and a name of its own, the inhabitants of which speak their own language, have their own literature and common institutions, which distinguish them clearly from other groups, are citizens of a unitary government, have an organic unity with one another, and are conscious of common destiny.” (Francis Lieber)

Nationalism’s hardware and software.

- “material” factors: population, territory
- political factors: citizenship, government
- cultural factors: sense of common destiny, “cultivation,” “name,” language, literature
- social-psychological factors: institutions, “organic unity,” “collective consciousness.”

How to put hardware and software together?

- Moderate primordialism: “modern nations simply extend, deepen and streamline the ways in which members of *ethnie* associated and communicated” (Anthony Smith)

How to put hardware and software together?

- Moderate modernism: “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist—but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on...” “Nationalism is not the awakening of an old, dormant force...It is in reality the consequence of a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state. It uses some of the already existing cultures but radically transforms them.” (Ernest Gellner)

The world according to nationalism.

- Internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity:

“In sum, nineteenth-century nationalism arose from the application (by de-traditionalized theoreticians and intellectuals) of anti-Enlightenment passions to politics. It succeeded...in ideologically manufacturing internal unities and external boundaries, standardizing an internal public culture and a powerfully symbolized external border.” (Ernest Gellner)

To induce coherence and to organize difference (Sewell) through the web of meaning.

- 19th century indicators of identity: language, religion, race.
- These categories “provided the common references required to transcend local or imported particularities and to demonstrate that, culturally, unity already existed and had always done so, even if it had yet to find political expression. In this regard, it furnished the foundation myths and symbols which secured the idea of the nation in popular sentiment. By the same token, it helped to define those who did not belong, who could not be right benefit from the political emergence of the ethnic nation—the outsider (even if territorially he was inside).” (M. Pearton, *Notions in Nationalism*, 1996, 6)

Nationalism as an immortalizing device.

Nationalism is a “secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning” that helps nations to establish continuity and to move over the rupture of modernity that brought them into being.

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. (1991)

How to move over the internal ruptures?

- To turn “exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts” into a narrative of identity that structures the nation’s biography;
- To put death through the procedure of remembering/forgetting. (Nation as a permanent effort to remember that we have to forget: Renan→Anderson.)

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

Nation against death.

- A modern site of cultural practice of collective immortalization and a cultural artifact that emerges out of such practice, which:
 - builds and celebrates identities by presenting them as primordial, essential, unified, and continuous;

- explains the world in which such identities are experienced;
- helps to survive ruptures by evoking a “future imaginable throughout the past.”

David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism* (1998)

Collective immortalization.

“Nostalgia for the past, especially the ethnic past of ‘one’s own’ people, has indeed been a feature of society in all ages and continents, because people have always sought to overcome death and the futility with which death threatens mortals. By linking oneself to a ‘community of history and destiny’, the individual hopes to achieve a measure of immortality which will preserve his or her own person and achievements from oblivion; they will live on and bear fruit in the community.”

Anthony Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986)

Differential deprivation of history.

The mythological emphasis of continuity often takes the form of a ‘differential deprivation of history’ to make other people ‘have no past on their own’ and to deprive them the right or possibility to demonstrate the ‘lasting visibility of their own past.’

Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992).

“People without history.”

- The colonized people as “without history,” which in fact means the “erasure of 500 years of confrontation, killing, resurrection, and accommodation” (E. R. Wolf *Europe and the People without History*. 1982, 18).

“Temporal estrangement.”

- The Other perceived in an “allochronic discourse,” which is the study “of other men in another Time” and which removes its referent “from the present of the speaking/writing subject.”
- J. Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. 1983, 143.

Modern identities.

- As an example of the homogenizing function of culture.
- As an attempt to control ambiguity by introducing an order (= an immortalizing strategy).

- As a proof that there is violence behind any social order. Real and symbolic violence.

The problem of class.

- Marxists, class, and the “wrong message” theory.

Social identity: Pierre Bourdieu.

- “I wanted to get away from the realist definition of class, which sees class as a clearly defined group that exists in the real world as a compact and sharply delimited real entity...My work consists in saying that people are located in a social space, that they aren't just anywhere,...and that according to the position they occupy in this highly complex space, you can understand the logic of their practices and determine,...how they will classify themselves and others and, should the case arise, think of themselves as members of a ‘class’.”

Bourdieu's “thinking tools.”

- **Practice**: what individuals do and how they think (classify, differentiate) in and about social situations.
- **Field**: practices take place in particular fields—social arenas, in which there is a permanent struggle for resources typical for a given field (economic goods, power, prestige, employment, education, housing etc.). Field organizes practices into strategies for preservation or improvement of *capital* that individuals possess.
- **Capital**: resources of different kind, to which individuals have access because of their position and/or inheritance. Cultural, economic, and social capital.
- **Habitus**: a shared body of dispositions to produce practices and products and to differentiate and appreciate them. “The habitus is necessarily internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions.”

The problem of habitus.

- An attempt to solve Durkheimian problem of social fact (“pattern” vs. real practice) or “a Trojan horse for determinism.” (J. Alexander, *Fin de Siècle*, 136)
- For Bourdieu, “actors are in a state of continuous adaptation to – not communication with – their external environments. We will see, in fact, that Bourdieu actually conceives of actors as motivated by a structure of dispositions which merely translates material structures into the subjective domain.” (135-6)

- [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice => (strategies)
(classifications generalized into life-styles)

Objective class and class as social identity.

- “Objective class”: a “set of agents who are placed in homogeneous conditions of existence...and producing homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating

similar practices, and who possess a set of common properties...and, in particular, systems of classificatory schemes.”

Objective class and class as social identity.

- Class as social identity: “Each class condition is defined, simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions, which is also a system of differences..., i.e., by everything which distinguishes it from what it is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference.”

Essentialism and anti-essentialism.

- The essentialist approach: “assumes that there is some intrinsic and essential content to any identity which is defined by either a common origin or a common structure of experience or both.”
- The anti-essentialist approach “denies the existence of authentic and originary identities based in a universally shared origin or experience. Identities are always relational and incomplete, in process. Any identity depends upon its difference from, its negation of, some other term...” (Lawrence Grossberg, *Identity and Cultural Studies*, 89)

An essentialist Rabbi.

- “If I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you. But if I am I because you are you, and you are you because I am I, then I am not I and you are not you.”

(Rebbe Mendel of Kotzk)

Anti-essentialist Fredrik Barth.

- “Ethnic boundary...defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.” (*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1969)

But...

- “Ethnic groups only persist as significant units if they imply marked difference in behaviour, i.e. persisting cultural differences. Yet where persons of different culture interact, one would expect these differences to be reduced, since interaction both requires and generates a congruence of codes and values—in other words, a similarity or community of culture. Thus the persistence of ethnic groups in contact implies not only criteria and signals for identification, but also a structuring of interaction which allows the persistence of cultural differences. ... Stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose such a structuring of interaction: a set of prescriptions governing situations of contact, and allowing for articulation in some sectors or domains of activity, and a set of proscriptions on social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification.” (Barth, *Ethnic Groups...*)

Poststructuralist criticism of “border,” “Us-Them”

- “Essentializing objectivizations” of linguistic, symbolic and institutional strategies of power.
- Identities as the results of exchanges which transcend borders; open processes of negotiations (without a “closure”).
- Production of identities as a result of social practices, usually associated with some sort of power, that refers to different meanings, employs different historical codes, produces and activates different memories and images.”

Heidrun Friese (ed.), 2002, *Identities. Time, Difference, and Boundaries* .

Identities:

- Essentialist (substance, content, idiom).
- Anti-essentialist (boundary, relation, negotiation).
- Hybrid: developed within liminal zones between fixed narrations. Cultures can be properly described neither in terms of the unique individuality nor in terms of the dualism “I – Other” (Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*)

Bourdieu: culture in action.

- Distinctive preferences in food space as (re)production of class identities.
- Culture as a resource in the reconversion strategies of the “cheated generation” in the academic system.
- Class as a product of symbolic power (“words that make things”).

Words that make things.

- “The class (or the people, the nation, or any other otherwise elusive social collective) exists if and when there exist agents who can say that they are the class, by the mere fact of speaking publicly, officially, in its place, and of being recognized as entitled to do so by the people who thereby recognize themselves as members of the class, people or nation, or of any other social reality that a realist construction of the world can invent and impose.”
- The problem of symbolic violence.

Postmodern death.

- Deconstruction of immortality (Bauman): Immortality dissolved into partial satisfactions and “life without project.” Destruction of future and linearity. Identity as something “here and now,” until further notice. Nothing is irreversible. Nothing disappears.

Postmodern power.

- Dissolved power: the postmodern power disappears from social relations or rather the whole social reality disappears and is replaced by hyperreality of “models, codes, information, and media.” The dead, abstract power resides in hyperreality as simulacrum, that is as a sign which lost any connection with anything signified, and is reproduced through “media, consumption, fashion, leisure, and semiotics,” not by any “real” strategies of “real” people trying to subordinate each other or liberate from subordination. Power is not “merely impossible to locate because of dissemination, but dissolved...and...made hyperreal through simulations.” (Baudrillard)

Criticism of Baudrillard.

- “On Baudrillard’s account, such things as human suffering and institutions that produce suffering, like prisons, mental institutions, sexual repression and practices, and the work place have no real significance; they are simply simulations without real power, efficacy or importance for the critical critic. But while these phenomena may not be real for the postmodern theorist sitting in his Paris apartment, puffing on his Gaulois or Cuban cigar with defiant pen in his hand, for those condemned to work for a living or condemned to live in prisons, hospitals and mental institutions, they are all too real.” (Kellner 1989: 141)

We need Foucault AND Baudrillard.

- “At times we still find ourselves victims of oppressive bureaucracies...; at other times we are confronted with the more subtle forms of disciplinary or normalizing power or the panoptic powers of surveillance which Foucault describes so well; and sometimes we find ourselves in the new situations which Baudrillard evokes, as when we are confronted with political or religious simulacra or with media signs which attempt to seduce us into purchases, normalized behavior, voting or whatever.” (Kellner 1989: 142)

Postmodern sexuality.

- In the past sexuality has been firmly placed in the “localized domain of erotic practices” defined by prohibitions and discourses. “Today...sexuality has...proliferated to such a degree in cultural semiurgy that it permeates society...” In contemporary society sexuality “is socially mandated, defined, normalized and proliferated” and “speaks in advertising, fashion, the media and other popular discourses.”

Postmodern sexuality.

- Consequences:
 - the end of repression: discourses encourage rather than limit sexuality;
 - the end of obsession: sexuality loses its mystery and its aura of a forbidden fruit;
 - the end of the liberating, rebellious potential of sexuality

Identity as a product of modernity.

- Identity: a “name given to the escape sought from uncertainty.”
- “One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper so that both sides would know how to go on in each other’s presence.” (Bauman, *From Pilgrim to Tourist*, 19)

Modern and postmodern identities.

- The modern problem of identity: “how to construct identity and keep it solid and stable”
- The postmodern problem: “how to avoid fixation and keep the options open” (Bauman 18)

Culture: chaos and system.

- Culture as chaos means that cultural meanings are inconsistent and/or that they are not commonly shared by members of a given culture.
- Cultural incoherence as an academic problem: it bothers scholars, not ordinary people, who are better equipped if they have multiple meanings to employ in the uncertain life.
- “...what appears as cultural incoherence is also adaptability, flexibility, keeping options open.” (Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love. How Culture Matters*, 2001: 183)
- Chaos is a defense against ideological dishonesty of order. (N. M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting*, 1997: 23)

Modern identity.

- A project: an obligation to assert that what is, is inadequate. Present → future. Life as a pilgrimage (asceticism, delayed gratification). Presupposes a solid world and a linear/cumulative time.
- “The...strategy of life as pilgrimage, of life as identity-building, was ‘saving for the future’, but saving for the future made sense as strategy only in so far as one could be sure that the future would reward the savings with interest.” (Bauman, 23)

Modern world hospitable to pilgrims.

- Orderly, determined, predictable, ensured. The world “in which one can tell life as continuous story, a ‘sense making’ story, such a story as makes each event the effect of the event before

and the cause of the event after..." (Bauman, 23)

- The world as a desert: ordered by modern pilgrims in an empty place.

Contemporary world as inhospitable to pilgrims.

- "The pilgrims lost their battle by winning it. They strove to make world solid by making it pliable, so that identity could be built at will, but built systematically... They proceeded by turning the space in which identity was to be built into a desert. They found out that the desert, though comfortingly featureless for those who seek to make their mark, does not hold features well. A gust of wind will do. And deserts are windy places." (Bauman, 23)

Postmodern identities.

- Problem shift: not how to built identity but how to preserve it (and whether to do it or not).
- Solidity is gone: disposable products instead of durable objects. "Identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume" (Lash in Bauman, 23)

Postmodern identities.

- Identities as "cultural recycling" which does not presuppose a continuity of culture and tradition. Identities made of heterogeneous fragments, improvised from different images found in the media, symbols and languages that originally were not "ours." (James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*)

Postmodern strategy of life.

- Life as a game to be split. Since the rules of the game change during the game, it is better "to keep each game short." To split a big "game of life" with big stakes into small games with small stakes.
- "To cut the present off at both ends, to sever the present from history, to abolish time in any other form but a flat collection or an arbitrary sequence of present moments; a continuous present." (Bauman, 24)