

The Julius Silver, Roslyn S. Silver, and Enid Silver Winslow

DIALOGUES IN ARTS AND SCIENCE

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE FUTURE, ETHNOGRAPHIES OF THE PAST

Fred R. Myers

Silver Professor of Anthropology, Art History and Religious Studies



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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1. Beyond the West and the Rest

What might be particular now to a sociocultural anthropological approach to the study of human differences and similarities? If we must write about the classic ethnographies largely in the past tense, because — for example — Aboriginal Australians no longer live as “hunter-gatherers” nor Trobriander Islanders as isolated from the Papua New Guinean nation-state and the tourist economy, what might a contemporary undergraduate textbook look like? Does it make sense to focus on the different levels of sociopolitical integration (“band societies,” “tribal societies,” “chiefdoms,” and so on), when these formations are no longer themselves living or contemporary forms? What, then, are (or ought to be the objects of ethnographic and anthropological study? Or, if anthropologists are only to represent the “local voice,” “the native’s point of view” as Bronislaw Malinowski famously wrote, with what authority can we engage or contest other social scientists, planners, or policy makers? Imagination and fruitful metaphor have been the attraction of much recent innovation, but in my view, anthropologists need also to sustain our place in social science, as an empirical social science, reinvigorating bases of validity and legitimacy for anthropological knowledge. Despite the contributions of critical cultural theory borrowed

from the humanities, it would be a mistake to give the powerful discursive field of “science” over to others. Consequently, anthropologists face the difficulty of finding methodological grounding that can support persuasively and forcefully the imaginative frameworks whose value we may perceive.

Since the late 1980s, the emphasis in sociocultural anthropology has been on a range of issues related to what the geographer David Harvey (1989) described as a “timespace compression” and what others formulated in the language of globalization, diasporas, and transnational processes. These changes — movements of culture and people on a worldwide scale — have been of central significance to anthropology, undermining any conception we might once have had of the autonomy of local cultural worlds and transforming the boundaries of any object of study. “Cultures” and “societies” are not (if they ever were) easily circumscribed units. Transnational processes have challenged, for example, the centrality of the nation-state to theorizations about culture and power. No longer just a term of anthropological art, “culture” has become a token in people’s own self-conscious understandings of themselves, a part of their own identities. Public debates about multiculturalism, and the increasing use of the culture concept outside of the academy and among peoples studied by anthropology have made “culture” an object of human social action, not just a context of human interaction. Nor does anthropology control the discussion of these issues. Questions about cultural processes and theorizing about “human nature” escape the boundaries of anthropology as a discipline. The major

paradigms framing cultural difference and human universals are profoundly contested; migrations, political collapses and social reorganizations transform the context in which the production of cultural meanings and theories of culture have been embedded and reproduced. For many anthropologists, this is a moment in which it is necessary to take up the sort of broad challenges with which our disciplinary predecessors struggled — to redefine the field of inquiry and research in relation to debates that have enormous significance in our own lives and those of the people we study.

To grapple with the changing situations of contemporary life, it has become necessary to place contemporary social anthropological practice in the crosscurrents of a burgeoning interest in culture and cultural differences. This is part of the changing historical conditions of the analysis of cultural practice in anthropology, shaped by a shifting of boundaries between those who study and those who are the objects of study, as well as the reorganization of disciplines and their location in the world. Anthropological representations of Aboriginal Australian community life, for example, are not external to their political and social world, nor are we able to insist on the security of the boundaries of our activities as “science” when members of these communities insist on their own conventions for producing and circulating knowledge. This has enabled (or forced) us to see our own practices of knowledge and theory production as cultural -- that is, specific and historically located. This is a relativization presaged both in Sahlins’ (1976) *Culture and Practical Reason* and Geertz’s (1973)

well-known essay on “thick description,” but one finally developed in the view of the anthropological enterprise as itself a “cultural project.” When “natives” (Indigenous people, Australian Aborigines, Native Americans and many others) argued that anthropological accounts — our representations — had power over their lives, we could hardly ignore the practical dimensions of what Foucault (1980, Said (1978) and others had theorized as the nexus of power/knowledge, a nexus that located anthropological accounts as part of the social world of the people about whom we wrote.

These realizations, both intellectual and practical (that is, enforced by the growing power of local people to determine their own participation in our research, the changing power relationship between observer and observed), are vitally part of contemporary anthropology. This “reflexive turn” is part of the struggle to locate ethnographic accounting theoretically and within complex social realities. A good deal of some of the most interesting recent work has been concerned with situating a subject’s reality — the arena best opened by interpretive ethnography — in relation to the often global or macrosocial processes. Unlike many of the world-systems theorists or political economy writers who had earlier argued against the boundaries between supposedly isolated systems, by the 1980s the leading edge of anthropological work engaged directly with the critical and political complexities of our own knowledge production. While this movement took place on many fronts, George Marcus and Michael Fischer’s (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (and Marcus’s inaugural editorship of

the new journal *Cultural Anthropology*) provided the most cogent synthesis of a new direction that engaged with the more fragmented realities of contemporary social life and the growing concern with the politics of representation — in which social theories were themselves part of the world of study. They focused, presciently, on the growing concern about the status of analytic theories themselves, on issue of how one might *represent* such a reality without privileging either the analytic framework of the social scientist or the subjective experience of the participant.

It might be helpful to understand this through Marcus's own early research with Tongan nobility, in the Polynesian Kingdom of Tonga. The situation that Marcus found — in the early 1970s — was not quite amenable to the theoretical and ethnographic tools he had available for thinking about Polynesian chiefs because their social reality had come to be related in complex ways to that of the larger world. One could no longer really write about them in Malinowskian island-culture ways. How does one write about nobles as they are now in Tonga? Where does one draw the boundaries of this object? What would an ethnography look like if *that* were its subject? Probably not like the structuralfunctionalist account in which each custom contributed to the survival of the society as a system. And how is one to understand the cultural dimensions of rank in a Polynesian society when the economic implications of it are greatly different from the past? These problems, I think, led him to start other research on elites and dynastic families in Galveston, on the one hand, and (on the other hand) to begin questioning the conventions of ethnographic writing that seemed to limit the

range of ethnographic questions possible. Marcus's response, seen in the long term I believe, has been to work on ways to link the worlds of ethnographic subjects with the larger processes in which they are embedded, looking for richer appreciation of the significance and detail of what one learns "in the field."

I mention Marcus particularly — among the many others who have participated in the reformulation of sociocultural anthropology (Appadurai 1996, Clifford 1988, Martin 1994, Rosaldo 1989, Taussig 1987, because his work differs from many other critical theorists in its orientation towards "opening up" ethnographic representation rather than simply deconstructing it. In his work, the possibility of positive knowledge remains, and his theorizing attempts to delineate the trajectories of contemporary anthropological work itself. I believe that the work of deconstructing the conventions of ethnography should be subordinated to the goal of coming to terms with the *anthropological* problem of representing an altered, modern social reality. In this circumstance, Marcus's work repeatedly suggests, ethnographic writing must come to terms with the penetrations of large-scale political and economic situations that have affected the cultures of ethnographic subjects almost anywhere in the world. According to Marcus (1998), the much-discussed "collapse of grand narratives" has meant that ethnographers could not simply invoke "capitalism" or "history to characterize an external system to which their local" case could be related or embedded. This has meant that the objects of study as well as the means or strategies of representation have been changed — as ethnographers now must

address also the broad range of actors and institutions moving out from and relevant to any local setting, many of whom are themselves also producing or circulating representations. Peoples and their cultures are being produced in multiple sites, no longer evidencing the stability of the once-favored supposedly unified object.

In Marcus's framework, then, there is a collapse of the space between what he calls "lifeworlds" (the phenomenology of daily life once the main aim of ethnography) and "systems" (the institutions or external political economies) in which they were once represented to be embedded. Thus, he argues, "Single projects must traverse and work through systems and lifeworlds in the very same frame, needing to keep eyes on both institutions and everyday worlds in trans-cultural space." New ethnographic studies figure critically in the development of this framework. Work such as Anna Tsing's (1994) account of the interior people of Kalimantan as "marginal people" rather than as a freestanding "society," and Faye Ginsburg's (1989) multi-sited study of the abortion controversy in a North Dakota town (and her shift from ethnographic film to the study of indigenous media [Ginsburg 1993]) exemplified the rethinking of the ethnographic object.

2. Beyond a Boundary: Following the Object, Pursuing Disruption

I have been myself engaged in such a project, and I will take the liberty of tracing it for the purpose of clarifying the changes I see occurring in anthropology. My own engagement with the problem that George Marcus and I called

“the traffic in culture” (1995) came in studying the production and circulation of acrylic paintings by Aboriginal Australians from the Western Desert (see Myers 1989, 1993, 2002). The so-called “Western Desert art movement” began in 1971, only two years before I started fieldwork in one of its central communities. It began with the deployment of iconographic images used in ritual, body decoration, cave painting, and so on — an iconography related indexically to the sacred traditions of the ancestral Dreaming, which gave the Aboriginal cultural world its meaning and shape — into acrylic paintings on 2-dimensional particle board or canvas. This “Aboriginal art” acquired the genuine status of “fine art” emphatically with a much-publicized show in 1988 at the Asia Society Gallery in New York, “Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia.” This show was a shock for someone like me, who was trained during the early 1970s in “ethnoaesthetics” as the the predominant anthropological framework for analyzing “art.” Coming to terms with this exhibition led me from an emphasis on such “ethnoaesthetics,” the local or indigenous categories through which the formal qualities of objects, activities, and practices are engaged, to a *different* point of departure — namely, one which begins with something like the hybrid, the crossing of traditions, where the stability of the ethnoaesthetic conventions is disrupted as objects move between and among participants who obviously do not share a framework of evaluation.

In the aftermath, as well, of the watershed exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984, “Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal

and Modern,” it seemed to me, as an ethnographer rather than an art critic, that charting this “traffic,” to follow the metaphor, was a more important and productive task than judging it — the activity that dominated Sally Price’s (1989) provocative first engagement with what she called “Primitive Art in Civilized Places.” Among the principal features of the new geography of artworlds was a partial destabilizing of the supposed boundaries between indigenous artworlds and the West. Thus, in the course of my study of circulation, it became clear to me in a very concrete way that a variety of Western discourses on the category “art” were a basic component of my ethnographic field -- that is, the context within which Aboriginal objects circulated. Even more, the emphasis on circulation led the way to seeing how the analytic vocabulary of “ethnoaesthetics” participated in a broader, Western philosophy of Modernist aesthetics even while it attempted to challenge its hierarchies.

The implicit Modernism (à la Clement Greenberg) was but the tip of a much larger iceberg. To be sure, the controversies of the “Primitivism” show illustrated the extent to which the discourses of “art” had become a significant arena in which images and identities of Aboriginal and other non-Western people — and other minority groups as well — were produced, transformed, and circulated transnationally in what Appadurai and Breckinridge (1988) called “the global cultural ecumene.” This global ecumene, however, has a shape that I thought local art histories — be they Aboriginal, Native American, or even Anglo-Australian — needed to chart. As with other examples of the sort

Marcus identified, the attempts to evaluate Aboriginal activities (similarly to the objects in the “Primitivism” show) were cultural; they seemed necessarily to reflect the discourses (note the plural) of Western culture. Indeed, the intercultural processes involved in the movements of objects and re-valuations from the international periphery to the center had been noticed by critics, and had usually been treated rather ambivalently by scholars — as examples of “colonial domination” (in the case of the “Primitivism” show), or even “ethnocide” in the case of the Aboriginal exhibition in New York. But mainly I found that the sensibilities organized in the discourses of contemporary art reflected larger, ideological concerns about art and the world, chiefly a fear of global processes of “cultural homogenization,” “mass culture,” “the market,” “kitsch,” and so on, that have long dominated avant-garde and elite thinking in the West. This was *all* culture, none of it outside my ethnographic frame, and this led me to a different way of engaging the phenomenon as fundamentally intercultural.

I would not wish to challenge claims that these Western cultural categories are hegemonic; these has been amply demonstrated in many well-known exhibitions and controversies. I did find, however, that most participants to these debates (including both anthropologists and art critics) were inclined to treat the Western category of “art” as monolithic, ignoring even the then-rather virulent modernist/postmodernist debates within the arts. Moreover, and relatedly, I thought insufficient attention had been given to understanding the processes at work in the larger, receiving society, and many of us began to take

steps towards considering the appropriating tradition more problematically, either through examining critically the cultural baggage of Modernist categories in the art world or with the goal of recognizing the potential of Aboriginal and other non-Western work work to challenge the categories of the artworld within its own terms.

This problem suggested not a movement away from empirical research towards critical theory alone. Instead, I realized that art criticism should be seen in a more complex light as a social practice to be studied. Further, it became necessary to conceive of the engagement of critical discourses with their subject as more than the encounter between reified cultural categories (our category of “art” and the Aboriginal category of “The Dreaming”), but as forms of human activity that can be in dialogue. Art criticism, I came to argue, plays a significant role in this process of producing “difference” and rendering it intelligible.

I was forced, in this process, to focus not just on the existence of “difference” (the different categories of evaluation and comprehension of Aboriginal understanding, for example), but on the process by which categories of evaluation and comprehension were brought into use, stabilized or contested. This can be compared to the more common earlier projects of an anthropology of art. The principal activity of this earlier project was to provide a translation for, or cultural context of, non-Western objects, a cultural rendering of their meaning or meanings in local context. These could then be compared and contrasted with those of our own (and other traditions). We came to understand, however,

that such a representational practice (not intentionally) had a range of discursive “effects” now regarded as problematic — among which might be listed the construction of cultures as bounded, timeless, and self-producing. These effects, it should be noted, all came into critical view in the responses to the MOMA exhibition where they were delineated as the underpinnings of a “primitivism” central to the category of “primitive art.” One need not take these criticisms as grounds for an absolute rejection of the pursuit of “ethnoaesthetics.” Instead, what they reveal is that the project of “ethnoaesthetics” tended to assume a stability in its object and was largely insensitive to the social embeddedness or institutional location of communicative conventions, and thus of the historical projects through which “ethnoaesthetic practices” themselves came into being and/or dissolved. It should be clear, nonetheless, that this project did not imagine intercultural circulation as anything more than a boundary condition of “primitive art,” an imagined primordial and authentic form. Indeed, it was left to Nelson Graburn (1976) to build a framework in which to place what was known as “transitional art,” a category — it might be argued — whose place is secured by the market for “primitive art” as much as any theoretical divide.

3. Continuities and Emergences

With these examples, I suggest that the worlds in which we work, both inside the academic institution and outside, demand more than ever a rethinking of basic concepts and methods and formulation of research projects to engage a

range of changing ethnographic objects. Some of us began our research careers with ethnography in smallscale societies, but we all recognize the difficulty of any anthropological project now that would disregard the way such social worlds are embedded in economic, political, and cultural processes of a larger order. However much anthropology might need to be transformed in the light of criticism, we remain largely held together in a firm grounding in the traditions and methods of the field focusing on two key disciplinary commitments. The first is the commitment to “fieldwork” — a coeval presence with social actors — as a way of challenging one’s embeddedness in systems of theoretical knowledge. It seems almost obvious now that social theories (secularization and modernization, for example) are not simply external to the phenomena under discussion but are very much part of it - as interpretations that are recognized and often contested as cultural phenomena and politically significant representations by those we seek to explain. We recognize the need to retheorize fieldwork practice, but continue to regard it as the foundation of anthropological knowledge. The second commitment is to the study of cultural processes and practices through which human action is individually and collectively mediated — that is, to the study of people doing things, of action and practices, rather than the study of culture as an object. Our interest is in how actors (or agents) constitute themselves and organize social life with particular attention to material culture, performance, and expressive media.

This is an account of globalization and fragmentation of objects; and

anthropological attention is increasingly focused on the multiplicity of emergent realities. Where many social critics imagined a growing homogenization in the world, the anthropological interest in difference and similarity has been looking closely at local responses and articulations of global responses, looking less at the center of expansion and more at the peripheries of engagement with these processes. Here, a long-term divide in anthropology may define the distinctive approaches to these problems — between those who might aim their attention at the systemic processes of expansion and aim at broad ranging theories and those who are inclined to ethnographic attention to local fragments, to find pieces of interesting and emerging human activity. Ethnography, one of the key methodologies of anthropology, remains central to the kind of knowledge anthropologists bring to the table of social science. We may be the foragers of social science, looking not first and foremost to theory building and verification procedures to justify our findings, but exploring the new objects and formations emerging in the world. The value of this kind of embedded knowledge of concrete human practices lies with the potential for unexpected and ironic outcomes. The ethnographic focus emphasizes attention to the level of “event” rather than “system” and concomitantly, I believe, has brought into focus a concern with “culture-making” and “cultural production” rather than already existing systems of meaning.

4. Ethnographies in and of the Future

So, what might the future look like? Given my claim about the multiplicity and emergent nature of new objects, the only reasonable way to proceed is by offering some telling examples.

As a first part of this outlining, I would identify a particular critical” trajectory that is reframing and repositioning anthropology as it recognizes the identity and location of the observer” and a change of the observer-observed relationship. Feminist anthropology, minority-written anthropology, anthropology in the Third World, and advocacy work — all of which assume an alteration in the “positioning” of the anthropologist. These practices, involving a change in the subject-position of the anthropologist-observer raise an important challenge to the role (and practice) of “cultural translation” as a foundation of anthropology. Relatedly, new work in the history of anthropology should be seen as part of this critical perspective, as well as a focus on the social and historical contexts of anthropological practice and theory.

The study of cultural interpretation as a human practice in other contexts — evangelizing, legal argument, teaching and so on - is also a step towards seeing and understanding anthropological practice as a specific sort of reframing. “Culture” — one of the central analytic concepts of our field --is also now a term involved in the social and historical practice of the people we study as well as those with whom we argue. A significant area of study concerns the changing meaning and significance of “culture” — in its commodification, unintentionally as part of a construction of “otherness,” in its transmission in

transnational practices, in tourism, in cultural policy, and so on. Finally, with the destabilizing of distinctive cultures, the place of culture in the four-field approach and in the troubled relations between sociocultural anthropology and biological anthropology now demands attention. One possible way of reframing the relations between subdisciplines — between the species dimension of human beings and the specific social dimensions — has emerged with the new developments of science studies. Exploring the ways that scientific knowledge reenters social life and becomes the basis around which new forms of organization emerge breaking down the artificial boundaries between “science” as a realm of knowledge and “society.”

An important configuration of current study involves what I would call the problem of “cultural mediations” — that is, the study of cultural forms as they mediate social relations at numerous levels of social action. This emphasis recognizes the arts, communications, and cultural production as central loci of study, approaching what had once been delineated as the study of the “symbolic” (work on religion, ritual, material culture, language, personhood, music, cultural spectacle, and art) and cultural form more explicitly as culture-making, as part of contexts of social action, as arenas of *cultural production*. Such a constellation of study goes beyond the older approach to “culture” by combining attention to the properties and effects of different media with consideration of their organization and circulation in social life. There has come to be a recognized affiliation among fields such as the anthropology of sound,

music and popular culture, the anthropology of media, visual art and material culture, and so on. Often, scholars find such cultural forms must be understood in relationship to projects of identity formation in broader national and transnational contexts. As an example with which I am familiar, there are a small, but growing number of scholars and students interested in art and material culture, and music and popular culture, emphasizing not “primitive art” so much as the institutions and practices of contemporary art worlds. They would be studying Indigenous art practices not just as part of the local communities in which they might be produced and circulated for local purposes, but also as part of a more globalize “art world” and “market” through which objects might circulate, be exhibited, and so on.

At one time, a class on “nonwestern art” would have focused primarily on the local uses of the cultural forms and perhaps on their “aesthetic” qualities within a local system of understanding. While this remains a significant area of study, many current scholars have found they cannot ignore the global, cosmopolitan processes within which any local art activity or cultural production takes place. An anthropologist of the 1950s or 1960s might have struggled against what he or she saw as “ethnocentric” understandings of cultural forms, whereas now he or she might study the processes in which value was conveyed on local cultural forms in the process of exhibition (nationally or internationally) or in the process of tourist commodification. This kind of study need not ignore the local processes of value construction, but it equally cannot simply

ignore the range of institutions and processes in which cultural production and circulation takes place. Work on the circulation of culture — or what I have called at other times the traffic in culture” — represents a broad swath of ethnographic study, ranging from the study of so-called “primitive art” as a form of intercultural appropriation or Indigenous assertion to the study of the emerging contentious field of “cultural property.” Indeed, the very framework of “cultural property” exemplifies the way in which claims over “culture” and its objectification have become objects of anthropological study themselves. Anthropologists have studied exhibitions, the processes of collecting, the questions of authenticity, and commodification as they relate to the objectification of indigeneity and identity. Current work now investigates how claims and counter-claims to legal, moral, ethnical, political, and intellectual heritage rights are being asserted. We will examine how assertions of cultural property impacts global circuits and markets of material culture, and how this concept shapes objects and knowledges today. The case studies for the course will draw on the research the instructors have done in areas of material and visual objects, and sonic objects and performances.

The fact of specialization often occludes awareness of the profound connections between apparently different kinds of study. The interest in “exhibition” and “representation” illustrated by the examples of an anthropology of art equally dovetail with what should be understood as a broader interest in the production of knowledge as an anthropological problem. *“Science studies”*

and *Medical Anthropology* participate in this project, and many scholars are now engaged in the attempt to study “science” as a form of cultural knowledge, embedded in specifiable institutional contexts and with effects on our understanding of human beings and the world.

It is highly desirable now for anthropology departments to be training students not only in general theory and ethnographic practice, but also to offer the kind of skills and foci of research that will help them find a place in the renewal of anthropology as the focus moves away from traditional societies. Medical anthropology is one of the burgeoning areas of the field. Currently the work in this area spans a range from anthropological concerns with “the body,” with new forms of reproductive technology, the politics of reproduction, with indigenous pharmacologies, curing, health care delivery, therapeutic practices, violence, and epidemiology. It has become a major area in which work both on gender and kinship has developed as well by virtue of the significance of new reproductive technologies. Medical, scientific knowledge of human bodies now stands in for the ideological formulations central to kinship and gender formations in pre-modern societies. As it is developing, then, Medical Anthropology has come to be concerned less with traditional curing, but rather with broader issues involved with industrialized societies, such as the production and deployment of medical knowledge.

Ongoing research projects in the intersection of Science Studies and Medical Anthropology with which I am familiar myself are examining the

intersection of reproductive technologies and the medicalization of social practices; the construction of genetic knowledge in labs, clinics, and genetic support groups; the social construction of diagnoses of emotion-related disorders and their relationship to the production of psychotropic drugs; the impact of the production of knowledge of genetics on definitions of kinship, on health activism and understandings of “life itself,” as well as notions of embodiment and disability. Medical, or scientific, knowledge of human bodies now stands in for the ideological formulations central to kinship and gender formations in premodern societies. More broadly, science studies engages with the effects of the production and dissemination of new scientific knowledge; and the remaking of the public sphere — from policy to social movements— as new media, information technologies and neo-liberal economies transform these arenas. The work in Medical Anthropology is closely tied with continuing work in feminist anthropology and gender and sexuality studies, and it has revived “kinship studies,” but all of this work evidences a strong continuity with classical anthropological concerns with kinship, personhood, and cultural construction.

Religion provides another example of how events in the world have had their effect on anthropological objects. The study of “religion” is surely the return of the repressed.” Always a staple of anthropological study in terms of cultural difference, ritual, and mythology, contemporary religion — and especially Christianity — have recently reemerged as an important locus of study. Perhaps anthropologists unconsciously bought into the secularization

hypothesis that imagined religion would disappear or perhaps the academic popularity of Marxist theory made religion seem epiphenomenal. The uptake of new media technologies by religious communities worldwide has been profoundly neglected, for example in studies of New Media. The rise of the New Right in the US, and religious fundamentalism worldwide demonstrate that the world religions are the most successful of globalizing cultural forms. Far from needing anthropological mediation or explanation as an atavistic form that “could be explained” and made comprehensible, the constructs of these religious movements strongly challenge the representations that anthropologists and other social scientists make. Indeed, many fundamentalists relativize or locate anthropological knowledge itself as a particular cultural formulation, as “secular humanism” for example. From this point of view, the relationship between secular knowledges and contemporary religion, the struggles over cultural authority are likely to become significant arenas of cultural struggle, new objects of study that — like the problem of cultural property — challenge the very frameworks of the discipline.

Whereas traditional anthropology identified a particular set of associations as constitutive of the object of society — nations, tribes, descent groups, families, communities, even networks and (sometimes) social movements — the trajectories and objects mentioned above represent a broader range of projects which are investigating the materials through and around which human association is constituted. The fragmentation of the traditional notions of the social

was recognized in the rise of the social movements concerned with identity, for example by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), but this rethinking of human sociality has proceeded both from a consideration of the globalization (and threatened cultural homogenization) of consumption of material culture (Appadurai 1996) and also from in a body of work and theory that begins less from a sense of fragmentation and reorganization of the units of social life and more from an engagement with materiality and its formative impact on human sociality. The emphasis on the materiality of cultural form self-consciously moves away from what had been the classical consideration of the social construction of the material, evidenced in structuralist work like that of Roland Barthes. In the introduction of a new volume, *Materiality*, Daniel Miller (in press) attempts to delineate the critique of anthropology that supposed an obvious separation of subjects and objects. He criticizes

the tendency to reduce all such concerns to what is in effect a reification of ourselves, as the subject, as social relations or as society. The apparent defining qualities of being human, including that posed by humanity as formed of sentient beings, are challenged, as are semiotic approaches that treat the world (or specifically clothing) as signs of underlying social relations.

In this formulation, and drawing on his own brilliant development of “consumption” as a productive dimension of social life, Miller focuses on the theoretical problem that he calls the tyranny of the subject” and seeks “seeks to bury society and the subject as the privileged premise for a discipline called Anthropology.”

Bruno Latour (1993), Daniel Miller (1987), and Marilyn Strathern (1999) are the most salient (and prolific) anthropologists identified with the broader movement, and what has been called “material culture studies” is one synthesis of this interest. Each in their own way critical of the emphasis on “discourse” (and meaning) as defining human life, these theorists ask how things — ordinary and otherwise — mediate human activity, objectifying and extending human personhood, agency and identities. These theoretical orientations, deriving from a range of interventions and instrumentalities in human life, have called attention to emergent realities — from websites to automobiles, from videocassettes to clothing, from the implications of new reproductive technologies to the patenting of human genes — that demand rethinking of approaches to human life.

From this point of view, we might see both a strangeness and familiarity in another trajectory of ethnography that has emanated more directly from the dislocations (or relocations) at work in the world — namely the study of national, Diaspora, and Indigenous identities and their mediation through popular and public cultural forms. These each represent large bodies of current work, obviously drawing on current significant developments in the social world. And with these shiftings and dislocations, and as a final point, I will mention the growing ethnographic interest in “history” and “memory” as significant social practices to be studied, as forms of contemporary culturemaking and as intimately connected to the material forms in which they are embodied — as work on “heritage” and “landscape” indicates.

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