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The History of Postmodern Anthropology

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The History of Postmodern Anthropology: The Intertemporal Heterarchy

Summary

Third in a series on the history of postmodern anthropology by the author, the book introduces the model for a historian of anthropology to combine epistemological analyses with that of anthropology of anthropology. The main argument is structured around the problem of the scientific status of anthropology, analyzed through various interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary "affinities" of postmodern anthropologists during the last decades of the twentieth century.

The first chapter introduces atemporal and nonhierarchical reading of history of the discipline in general. Intertemporality is introduced as a means of proving the inapplicability of standard models history of anthropology uses as explanatory means. Intertemporality of the postmodern condition allows for a freedom in the selection of styles, once they are divorced from their chronological contexts. In the context of methodology, this serves to dispel the ties between the subject, theory, method, paradigms, institutions and historical periods, allowing us to reflect on "Clifford's influence on Bronislaw Malinowski", for instance. Metalepsy or heterarchy are borrowed from discourse analysis, in order to introduce the possibility of narrative transgression of levels. Heterarchy is a radical narrative approach which introduces antihierarchical relation-

ships between different sorts of narratees, ultimately dispelling the border between reality and illusion. Introduction of intertemporality and heterarchy to the history of anthropological methodology allows us to claim that postmodern theory of ethnography, through a reversible process of re-signification and re-interpretation, determined the notion of anthropology in the social transformation of the roles of research and education. As history of anthropological methodology does not have an "end", the "end" itself exists in an intertemporal heterarchical genealogy that implies the hybrid identities of our subjects and ourselves.

The second chapter is dedicated to the inquiry into the consequences of the merging of ethics, politics and methodology in the Critical anthropology of the 1960s. It offers an alternative interpretation of the genesis of the literary turn in anthropology, interpreting it as an "interim solution" in the context of the ideological incorrectness of radical anti-colonial theories in a liberal democracy. Critical anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s drew considerable inspiration from reformist currents in neo-Marxist sociology and social philosophy, arousing ideological opposition among the numerous participants in methodological debates in anthropology. This opposition proved crucial for the subsequent modest development of potentially fruitful debates. This activist ideological ballast actually slowed down the development of potent externalist analyses of the social determination of both anthropology and academia in general, clearing up the space for the studies of ethnographic writing. Anticipating, in terms of themes and trends, "unmethodological" solutions to methodological problems, it had a direct effect on the substitution of poetics and contextual reflection for methodological regulation. As a consequence, paradoxically, very externalist analyses that attempted to merge ethical, political and methodological debates ended up reducing the methodological focus of the disciplinary community from such

issues as research objectivity and reliability of ethnographic records to issues concerning style and the writing of anthropology. In this context, debates on relativism, realism, representation, authority and reflexivity, typical of the 1980s postmodern anthropology, have become a socially acceptable alternative to the critical, neo-Marxist or native anthropologists. The "literary turn" in postmodern anthropology is generally interpreted as an externalist critique of traditional ethnographic realism, offering an ethical and political interpretation of reflexivity as *per se* more correct than traditional positivist ethnography.

The third chapter, which stands as a primer on intertemporal analysis, explains how James Clifford influenced Bronislaw Malinowski, leaving us with no room but to imply intrinsically realist features of classical ethnography during the postmodern debates, accepting the notion of realism that stems from literature studies, as opposite to the realism as it is normally defined in philosophy of science. These developments have had serious moral consequences. The transdisciplinary migration of "realism" from literary theory to the methodology of the social sciences produced a new history of anthropology. The history of pre-postmodern anthropology constructed in this manner can be said to fit the register of comparative cultural theory of retroactive moral judgement, complementing postmodern anthropology as a general theory of "writing political subjects". In this context, theoretical dilemmas of postmodern anthropology do not constitute the proof of legitimacy in a holistic interpretation of the discipline's founders' intentions, but rather lead to neo-pyrrhonic, formalistic endeavors to uphold, by respecting academic trappings, the academic authority of the discipline whose subject, method and purpose, as a rule, even colleagues from proximate disciplines fail to understand. The evidence for such a bold argument is derived from Clifford's writing of Malinowski.

Further, the moral implications of the unfortunate analogy between the writing of political subjects and the writing of disciplinary founders are followed. The author then goes on to explain that the critique of the possibilities of misuse, particularly through political instrumentalization, of anthropological fictions as evidence of Others did not have to come at the cost of sacrificing the illusion of continuity in the establishment of anthropology as a "proper" academic discipline.

This very tension between affinity to literature studies and the philosophy of science is explained in the fourth chapter, where paradigmatic slowdowns and interdisciplinary commonplaces are revealed both as accelerators and obstacles to the development of a comprehensive theory in anthropology. Deep confusion regarding "realism", as one of three basic elements of postmodern crisis in anthropology, has been generated by naïve (and therefore popular) attempts to solve methodological problems by using means typical for literary criticism. The problem of confounding "realism" of literary theory with "realism" of philosophy of science is explained as an implication of postmodern anthropology's founding authors' accidental/strategic ignoring of the debate on difference between reality of theories and reality of entities. Post-positivist philosophy of science (that allegedly promoted "key interdisciplinary affinity" of postmodern anthropology) did not offer a final model of the critique of possibility for discovering the criteria of objective knowledge,. The founding authors of postmodern anthropology adopted only specific skeptical readings of this shift in focus in the thinking on science from the interdisciplinary scene. "Revelation" that real scientific practice is less guided by formal rules, and more by context or frame of reference, is an argument that pleases anthropology, but the path that was crossed in philosophy of science so as to get to this revelation did not exclude standard methodological endeavor

to set norms and regulate the research. Normative regulatory dimension of general methodology somehow got "dropped" along the way. In the mess of political critique (of the external pressure) and epistemological naivety (of the internal discipline's heritage), neo-relativist concepts did dominantly take over the quotation scene, but the reduction of the concept of the paradigm to the concept of culture in anthropology (a completely specific disciplinary reading, which will only come back from anthropology to meta-scientific disciplines some years later) created a new frame of reference, in which reformers of anthropological methodology confused critique of realist conception of reality with the critique of realist conception of science.

The last chapter focuses on the certain view of structural anthropology as opposed to the re-ethnographization of anthropology deemed unscientific, which is the way Belgrade Structural semiotic School of Folklore has perceived postmodern theory of ethnography. Taking into account recent critiques of "underdevelopment", "positivism", "methodological backwardness" and other failings attributed to so-called "American anthropology" by some of the authors from the Belgrade Structural-semiotic School of Anthropology of Folklore, the author analyzes the context in which colleagues and students may be tempted to explain away the commonsense political connection between polyphonic ethnography, neo-romanticism and nationalism, as counter-intuitive history of the discipline. Important transformative differences in the attitudes towards structuralism between European anthropologists, especially Belgrade Structural-semiotic School of Anthropology of Folklore and so called "American Anthropology", are the consequence of a pure coincidence – the fact that French structuralism and French poststructuralism were launched *simultaneously* at the American interdisciplinary intellectual scene ("Theory") at the *same* conference. This ironic concurrence

would not be much more than one entertaining episode for students, historians of anthropology and historians of ideas, if there were no attempts (increasingly frequent and increasingly fluently articulated) to compare different intellectual traditions as they were elements of the same unilineal evolution of the discipline. Transformation of Levi-Strauss's analysis and limited success of its adaptation to the analysis of phenomena that usually concern anthropology happened *simultaneously* with the development of the critique of structuralism as a theory of culture in the American academic scene. This proves that there is at least one "Atlantic split", analogous to that in philosophy, making the measurement of comparative 'academic achievements' of the specific and unconnected disciplinary traditions impossible. Indirectly, this chapter explains that Levi-Strauss's work had contradictory functions in the history of ideas in anthropology, serving as a starting point for the 'postmodern' neo-romantic and positivist critique of imperial realism (in USA), as well as an 'enlightened', realistic and antitribal critique of ethnology as positivist, nationalist and national science (in Serbia). Special emphasis is placed on the *local context* in which structuralism as a founding discourse of the science of anthropology is opposed to ethnology as a form of national prose. As such it had completely different role in comparison to structuralism in a) the history of American anthropology and b) in the history of interdisciplinary/post-modern Theory.

The concluding chapter offers an argument for preserving the postmodern suggestions on how to solve the problem of the scientific status of the discipline, with the disciplinary core open to various interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary concerns, allowing us to bricolage the history of anthropology regardless of paradigms, research programs, agendas or any other common denominator of various disciplinary traditions.