

Department of Anthropology & The Centre for Museums, Heritage
and Material Culture at University College London

“Re-Thinking Ethnology”

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- Abstracts -

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Martine Segalen

(University of Paris, Nanterre)

“Material culture and French ethnology”

The development of a scientific French ethnology, detaching itself from folklore, was firmly grounded in the study of technical culture, under various influences including geographers, and archeologists, the most prominent of which was André Leroi-Gourhan who inspired a large part of the presentations of the Musée national des arts et traditions populaires. During a few decades, the interest for material culture was superseded by others themes even though it never ceased, but it was disconnected from Museum presentations. Nowadays, the interests range from the focus on domestic settings, or various social uses of communication tools, as a way to understand new aspects of modernity. The

presentation will run through these historical times, and will be based on concrete examples of research past or going on.

Orvar Lofgren

(University of Lund)

“Researching the backyards of modernity. On the power of the insignificant”

Focusing on everyday life or the materialities of the mundane has not only been research strategies of much ‘anthropology at home’, but also rallying cries or positioning symbols in relations to neighbourhood traditions like cultural sociology or cultural studies. The result has been an emphasis on certain styles of doing research, that often are more characterized by an academic habitus than by clear theoretical profiles. What about this elusive habitus – the unwritten rules about ‘how we do research here’? Drawing on my background in Scandinavian ethnology I will explore these styles, but also discuss the necessity of a continuing interests in what is going on in the backyards of modernity (and post-modernity). So much of cultural research has been focusing on the dramatic and the eventful, overemphasizing societies in flux, fragmentation and constant change. We need to focus more on the insignificant, overlooked and seemingly trivial, the kind of micro-processes that create continuity and stability, but also sudden surprises.

Vintila Mihailescu

(University of Bucharest)

“Reinventing the local and revisiting domestic anthropology”

Mondialization is producing also “re-localization” (Long, 1996). Marketing of traditions, as part of local development and world tourism, is re-rooting “authenticity” in a kind or another of local specificity. For different reasons and in different ways, the “local” is thus being reinvented as social frame and object of anthropological interest. In countries like Romania, with a long and strong tradition of *national ethnology* and a still emerging (westernizing, post-modern) anthropology, the representatives of the two “disciplines” are competing for expertise and legitimacy concerning the new challenges of the “local”, ignoring in fact each other. The paper is presenting as a “case study” the eight years long fieldwork trajectory of a PhD dissertation on the marketing of traditions in Romania, and the way it moved from a militant deconstruction of the “local myths” to a more tempered approach, taking in some of the *longue durée* aspects of this present marketisation. In doing so, the anthropological approach had to open up to some kind of dialogue with its “professional other”, the domestic ethnologist. The moral of the story is the scientific and political need of such a

critical dialog for the understanding of the new configurations of local and global and in order to build a coherent institutional discourse.

Wang Mingming

(Peking University, Central Minzu University)

“The war between ethnology and anthropology and its end? Some remarks from a Chinese anthropologist”

What is to be said? Levi-Strauss once described anthropology as a science encompassing sciences, a generalizing anthropology living on the findings of ethnography and comparative ethnology. For those who intend to “bring ethnology back in”, what Levi-Strauss said still now sounds like a useful perspective. However, to my colleagues in Beijing, what Levi-Strauss said represents a very disturbing idea. Chinese ethnologists, or those who call them “*minzuxuejia*”, are those who hate anthropologists. Three decades ago, they successfully gained the support from the Ministry of Education and Committee of Ethnic Affairs to designate the interrelationship between ethnology and anthropology as “ethnology (encompassing cultural anthropology)”. In 1995, a group of anthropologists came together in Beijing and produced a counter proposal. They produced a “petition” and handed it in to the Ministry of Education. They argued that anthropology should be an independent discipline. The person in charge of disciplinary divisions in the Ministry responded to the anthropologists by saying that anthropology, or *renleixue*, sounded strange to the Chinese people, and even to him, and it seemed to be a useless discipline, being unrelated to “our socialist modernization”. He was not disagreed with the idea of more independence for anthropology. But he kindly expressed his worries about the future of an independent but vaguely defined and useless discipline: unlike ethnology which has lived on funds provided by the Committee of Ethnic Affairs, anthropology has difficulties in finding resources other than from foreign grants. In the end, taking the point of Fei Xiaotong, one of the great anthropology disciples of Bronislaw Malinowski, then, vice-president of the National People’s Congress, the Ministry of Education decided that anthropology should be included in “greater sociology” (*da shehuixue*), whereas ethnology should continue to be a “first rank discipline”.

Many interrelated lines of disciplinary history should be examined to interpret the tension between ethnology and anthropology in China. These lines, once patterned out, will be useful to our anthropological rethinking of ethnology or ethnological rethinking of anthropology.

I will discuss the following:

1. Brief background:

A brief introduction to the war between the school of ethnology and the school of sociology in Chinese “anthropology” between the 1920s and 1940s, to the

unification of ethnology and sociology in the study of ethnic minorities and “the national question” in the 1950s, and to the new war between ethnology and anthropology in the past 30 years;

2. Analysis:

1) certain “Western backgrounds” against which the difference between ethnology and anthropology became a burning issue in Chinese “anthropology”: Chinese “versions” of Malinowski (Fei), Radcliffe-Brown (Lin), Mauss and Granet (Yang), Bastian and G.E. Smith (Cai and Ling), Boas (Li and Lin) , and Morgan (all ethnologists in the 1950s);

2) methodological contraries: “isolates” and “intercultural relationship”; habitation and movements; sociology and history;

3. Combination

1) Rowlands’ critique of the sociologizing of anthropology;

2) “making peace” between ethnology and anthropology?

3) an ethnological anthropology tells us many things, including the historical depth of inter-societal relationship, the importance of studying “intermediate zones”, the re-conceptualization of the concept of alterity, and the limit of social theory.

Papataxiarchis Evthymios

(University of the Aegean/Greece)

“From estrangement to rapprochement? Reflections on the current prospects of the relation between Anthropologia and Laografia in Greece”

In 20th century Greece *Anthropologia* (anthropology) despite its common intellectual roots developed quite separately from *Laografia*.(folklore studies). Modernist *Anthropologia* emerged in the context of Malinowskian type ethnography as this was practiced first, by Anglo-american anthropologists in the post war decades, and latter by their Greek students in the late 1970s when it academically established itself in the framework of the inter-disciplinary alliance called ‘social science’. *Laografia*, on the other hand, became institutionally prominent in the interwar period under the aegis of German *Volkskunde* and, together with archaeology and history, remained at the centre of the so called ‘national science’ till the 1970s. The two disciplines developed therefore quite different theoretical profiles and methodologies and became entrapped in a climate of mutual antipathy and distrust that was reinforced by the struggles for institutional advantage between the wider paradigms to which they were committed. In this paper I want to consider more recent mutations of *laografia* in dialogue to oral history, sociology or even social anthropology and in relation to subjects such as memory or material culture. I am particularly interested in

connections between the two disciplines and attempts to rethink ethnology within the framework of postcolonial 'world anthropologies'.

Cristina Sanchez-Carretero

(Spanish Council for Scientific Research/ Madrid)

"A critical approach to Ethnology: Towards an "Emergency Ethnology"

The main objective of this presentation is to rethink future possibilities for ethnology, and rethink the formats in which ethnologists package their research. To do so, I suggest the need to develop the concept of 'emergency ethnology', that is, the need to develop tools and theories to enable ethnologists to respond in crisis or emergency situations. This is necessary in order to avoid reproducing old models that have long been discarded by ethnologists and which involve essentializing and fossilizing customs and traditions. We are experts in a field in which a major objective is the analysis of the processes of traditionalization in our societies. The role of ethnology as an active social force cannot be based on dichotomies – and battles – such as public vs. academic folklore; these do not help our discipline to envision a sustainable future. Our discipline provides a very open path for exploring new ways of transferring our research to society, and new possibilities in the "performance" of academics. There is a demand for researchers to address folk culture, orality and expressive culture in daily life. However, public institutions, in Spain, typically develop public folklore programs without the aid of ethnologists or anthropologists. There is an urgent need to create multidisciplinary teams to engage in the study of the processes of heritage transformation in a critical manner, and to incorporate strong theoretical approaches in the process.

Giovanni Kezich

(Museo Degli Usi e Costumi Della Dente Trentina/ San Michele)

"Carnival King of Europe". Towards a new interpretation of European winter masquerades".

Extensive fieldwork carried out in 2007/09 in six European countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Croatia, Italy, France, Spain) by an international team of ethnographic museum curators, and supported by the EU under the premises of a project called "Carnival King of Europe", has put in evidence the striking similarities that can be observed in the winter rituals that are carried out in a number of localized rural communities across very wide distances at the four corners of the continent. Such rituals, most often classified as "Carnivals" within the available Christian calendrical vocabulary, entail standard characters and standard acts, performed within a very

similar basic structure. Among these, we find the sudden appearance of stocky masked mummers girdled by cowbells, often wearing tall conical caps adorned with ribbons; the representation of a mock nuptial cortege in conjunction with the ritual ploughing of the village square; the subsequent invasion of a crowd of specific burlesque characters, and finally, the trial and sentencing to death of a pivotal figure, which is often identified with “Carnival” itself. Such a widespread occurrence of what can be clearly defined as a single, culturally discrete pattern of ritual behaviour, naturally begs the question related to the time and modalities of its original diffusion. In this particular perspective, which is the same pursued by Sir J. G. Frazer one hundred years ago, some interesting progress can be made by making usage of modern audiovisual recording devices, whilst some new inferences can be captured as to the original link of such rituals with some aspects of the initiatory agrarian cults of the ancient world, so as to be able to consider once again, at least tentatively, some fundamental aspects of European culture within the terms of a broad ethnological synthesis.

Mihaly Hoppal

(Institute of Ethnology, Budapest)

“To be or not to be...Perspectives in/for Ethnology”

Re-Thinking has become recently an anthropological pastime among the scholars of ethnology. I shall discuss which intellectual endeavours of ethnology provide further results in the future. First of all ethnosemiotic has to be mentioned. After the post-modern turn in anthropology some outgoing themes will vanish (like ‘invented tradition’) but in a globalized world the importance of local cultural tradition will become the centre of interests. In the form of eco-ethnology, anthropology of balance (in ethnomedicine, shamanism) will be studied by the help of visual anthropology. At the same time new techniques of fieldwork also will be introduced (world wide web as a field, etc.)

Frederic Damon

(University of Virginia)

“HOUNDED BY CULTURE. What We Know...And What Is To Be Done”

Predicated on the unlikely fact that our current financial crisis brings us to a turning point rather than a recurring episode in capitalist culture, this paper takes off from the ruins of the Post-Modernist critique, argues for what we have done, and contemplates what the role of ethnology should be as the world attempts to re-arrange its conditions of existence. I begin with the problem of ‘arbitrariness.’ From de Saussure to Langer this became the 20th century’s problem of meaning. I then argue for the situated constructions that came into

existence from roughly 6000 years ago to the expansion of Western Europe beyond its geographical confines. I conclude by suggesting what ethnology must contribute to our new future.

Chris Wingfield

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Pieter Ter Keurs

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