

SYMBOLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

For Your Files

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A. ORIGINS OF SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS

1. Evolutionary School (Tylor, Morgan) - Studied culture in general, tracing development from Barbaric to Civilized
2. Historicist School (Boas) - Studied cultures with goal of understanding origin. Religion as accidental to society.
3. Functionalist (Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown) - Examined various components of society which maintained its order. Religion & ritual one of many essential elements.
 - Culture seen to be system of meanings & values (Kroeber, Radcliffe-Brown, Redfield). Communications theory.
4. Interest in how symbols express these meanings & values
 - "The specification of what kinds of symbol systems cultures were made up of and how these were related to social action, to individual personalities, and to ecological conditions begins to be explored in the 1960's & 1970's in the work of Levi-Strauss, Geertz, Schneider, Leach, Turner"
 - Functional model did not account for change (Singer 1977:50)
 - role of cognitive processes in affecting society.
 - "Ideas are not epi-phenomenal" (Turner 1974:55).
 - Religion, culture, & person seen to be system of symbols

B. NATURE OF SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLISM

1. Influence of phenomenology and C.S. Peirce (1839-1914)
 - Pragmatic philosopher associated with William James
 - Studied Kant: importance of mind in organizing experience according to categories of logic. Categories seen as dynamic by Peirce. Whitehead & Russell's Principia Mathematica
 - Influenced idea of self as "semiotic" (Singer 1980) [1910]
 - Phenomenology (Husserl, 1950) - Conscious awareness of non-empirical entities, phenomena, observation data
2. Nature of Signs - "Something that stands to somebody for something" (Peirce 1931:2.228) Plato: Mimetic, Deictic, Symbolic
 - 2.1 Index: Sign which refers to Object by virtue of being really affected by that Object. Contiguous Association.
 - 2.2 Icon: Sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of its own characters. Resemblance Assoc.
 - 2.3 Symbol: Sign which is constituted a sign merely or mainly by the fact that it is used as such. Conventional Assoc.
3. Nature of Symbols
 - 3.1 Leslie White's redefinition of sign & symbol (1940:451f)
 - Signs: Direct representations of other things
 - Symbols: Link physical things conventionally w/ mental concepts.
 - 3.2 Symbols are human creations, culturally made
 - meaning in the mind, subject to change, development
 - not universal, similarities caused by: childhood experiences (Freud), Archetypes (Jung), Physical processes (Turner).
 - 3.3 Symbols are reflective and active
 - Whorf & Sapir hypothesis, e.g., English & Hopi languages
 - Stimulate action, powerful (Wolf Virgin of Guadalupe)
 - 3.4 Symbols are ambiguous, slippery abstractions
 - "Multivocality" (Turner, The Forest of Symbols 1967)
 - Possibility of meaning and communication (Nida 1960:90)
 1. Similarity of meaning process
 2. Common range of human experience
 3. Adjustability of Symbolic framework

C. RELIGION AS A SYMBOL SYSTEM

2.

1. Clifford Geertz (1973) - "Religion is....
 - 1.1 A system of symbols which acts to
 - 1.2 establish powerful, pervasive & longlasting moods & motivations in persons by
 - 1.3 formulating conceptions of a general order of existence
 - 1.4 clothing these conceptionsw/ such an order of factuality
 - 1.5 that the moods & motivations seem uniquely realistic."
2. Culture as a symbolic system - "The only way in which a native's own logic can be discovered is through the study of culture as a total system of symbols and meanings, not through the accretion of isolated studies of cultural symbols" (Schneider in Umiker-Sebeok, 1977:128).

D. SYMBOLIC APPROACH TO CULTURE

"Symbolic Anthropology" (J.L. Peacock & R.W. Crab, 1975),
"Interpretative Anthropology" (Geertz, 1976), "Comparative Symbology" (Turner 1974, 1975; Douglas 1970), "Semiotic Anthropology" (Singer, 1977 - Gr. semeion "a mark")

1. Structuralist Analysis

- 1.1 Study of symbolic classification, native categories and relationships (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963; Sapir, Whorf 1931)
- 1.2 Objective to discover interrelationship and underlying "logic" of native categories represented by symbols
- 1.3 Levi-Strauss' "Binary ^{opposition} approach" (Elementary Structures of Kinship 1969).
- 1.4 Criticized: ^{- some are in opposition of themselves}

- Overlooked analogic and qualitative modes of thought.
Symbols as rational & intentional, involving complex systems of social classification (Leach in Lessa 1979:153) ^{J. Overland on E. The Animals in U.S. + Korea}
- Neglect of activity and social influence of symbols

2. Processual Analysis - Victor Turner

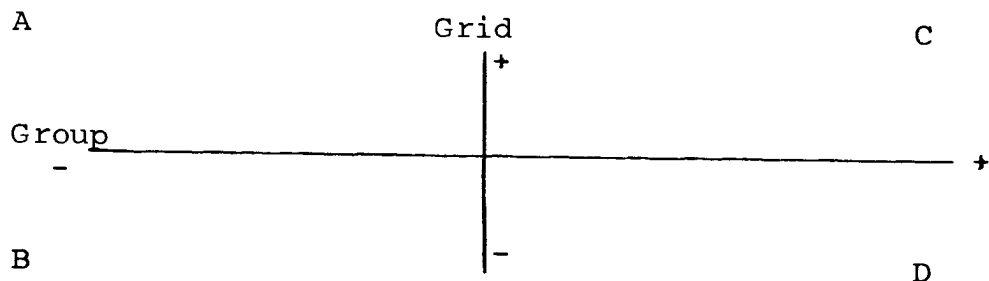
- 2.1 Study of how symbols trigger social action & process by which symbols acquire and shed both public & private meaning
"How do symbols work?" (1974:55)
- 2.2 Symbols are "ontological" not "epi-phenomenal"
- "Anti-Structural" Symbols do not only reflect or express social structure, religion is not a neurotic system or cultural defense mechanism. (Geertz also 1973:449).
- 2.3 Liminal period in Arnold van Gennep's Rites of Passage (1909)
- Stages: Separation → Margin (limen) ^{Latin threshold} → Aggregation
- Liminal stage: initiates are passive, malleable, submissive, uniform, impressionable with symbols of the culture - Pilgrimage
- "Communitas" (symbolic acculturation) engendered by ritual humiliation. Anti-structural existential bond (I-Thou)
"A moment when those being moved in accordance with a cultural script were liberated from normative demands, when they were betwixt and between successive lodgements in jural political systems. In this gap between ordered molds, almost anything can happen." (1974:13)

- 2.4 Root-Metaphors: (Stephen Pepper, 1942) 3.
 -Symbols which elaborate our world, basic analogy
 -e.g. Society is a "living organism" or "working machine"
- 2.5 Root-Paradigms: Organizing concepts which motivate action. e.g. Martyrdom as acceptable (1974:60-98).
- 2.6 Fields: Abstract cultural domain where paradigms are formulated, established, & come into conflict.
- 2.7 Social Dramas: When differing paradigms conflict.
 a. Breach of regular, norm-governed relations w/in group
 b. Mounting or escalation of crisis
 c. Redressive action, adjustive mechanisms intervene
 d. Reintegration or secession of groups

"To view society as human process, rather than as atemporal timeless or eternal system modeled either on an organism or a machine, is to enable us to concentrate on the relationships existing at every point and on every level in complex and subtle ways between *communitas* and structure" (Turner 1974:52) *for further explanation of Turner's vocabulary cf. 1978:243-255, Appendix A.*

- 28 Criticism - Why do symbol systems become stale or perverted, with people losing belief resulting in not only anxiety but also feelings of liberation and relief?
 (Charles Leslie 1970:702)
 -Question remains: How do symbols work?

3. Cosmological Symbolology - Mary Douglas (Natural Symbols, 70)
- 3.1 Most symbolic behavior must work through the body.
 - Strong tendency to replicate the social situation in symbolic forms by drawing richly on bodily symbols
- 3.2 Basil Bernstein Sociological Determinants of Perception 1958. Language has speech codes which inhere in the form of social relations and restrict perceptions of the speaker, *limits choices of interpretation. Speech is a social institution, like family & religion (1970:20).*
- 3.3 Develops single formula for classifying social relations. All societies structured according to:
Group - Experience of a bonded social unit.
Grid - Rules which relate one individual to another on an ego-centred basis (1970:105) *World-view*



- A - Success-cosmology; syncretist, ritualism
 B - Benign, unstructured cosmos; unmagical, weakly condensed symbols, personal religion
 C - Complex regulative cosmos; dangerous & benign elements
 D - Dual philosophy of good & evil; irrational, dominated by witches and counter-witchcraft rituals

3.4 Ritual is an integral part of society

- Anti-ritualism in Western "secular" society is really the adoption of one set of religious symbols in place of another. Like a switch between speech codes, ^{elaborated vs.} _{restricted (1970:20)}
- Recognition of motivating power of symbols
- "Destruction of categories of any kind is a symbolic act which replicates social life over-structured by grid, the experience which has always driven people to value unstructured personal experiences and to place their faith in a catastrophic event which will sweep away all existing forms of structure"(1970:xvi).

3.5 Douglas as dynamic structuralist

E. IMPLICATIONS

1. Understanding Cultures

- 1.1 Importance of role of symbol systems in every society and how symbols affect society
 - Sherry B. Ortner "On Key Symbols" (Lessa 1979:92-98)
 - Outlines framework for discerning which symbols are "key" for any specific culture utilizing classification of Summarizing Symbols & Elaborating Symbols (which include root metaphors and key scenarios)
- 1.2 Appreciation for symbolic systems of religion and ritual as more than epi-phenomenal. Essential to understanding any culture. Person also seen in terms symbols.
- 1.3 Stress on cognitive analogies instead of functional analysis
- 1.4 Recognition of the dynamics of religion and culture, which do change through time and sometimes may need to change. Change is not necessarily negative.

2. Reaching Peoples

- 2.1 Importance of discerning symbol systems of people which dominate, and when they are expressed and most subject to change, viz., such as during the liminal period.
- 2.2 Contextualization must be done in view of the symbol systems of the people, as well as to forms of their expression. cf. Kraft & Wisley Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity 1979; Smalley Readings in Missionary Anthropology II, 1978:3-124.
 - More attention to symbolic analysis would assist these works considerably, *because symbols tie meaning + form together.*
- 2.3 Church Growth seen as more than changes in structure according to one paradigm. Realize there are other helpful "root-metaphors" than the biological. The language code of C.G. reveals its commitment to a particular symbolic cosmology (Douglas).
- 2.4 Indigenous rituals viewed as important clues to understanding cultures as well as providing concepts to motivate socio-spiritual action.
- 2.5 Problem of syncretism becomes difficult in understanding how to utilize indigenous symbols without the "pagan" residual meanings. cf. Tippett "Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity" Kraft & Wisley 1979:400-424.