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B. Valade

Modernity: Anthropological Aspects

1. Modernity as Frame and Problem in Anthropology

The idea of modernity has operated as a historical framing for anthropology, but the categories of what is modern (radically new) in the human condition have shifted throughout the history of the discipline. At a simple level, we can say that the social sciences are generally about the study of modern societies, so why would anthropologists discuss modernity as an isolated area? We can say that anthropology is a *modern* study of human existence in which the *anthropos* becomes an object of knowledge and also a technique of modern power. For a discipline that produces its knowledge through an intimate experience of the (exotic) other, the field is particularly unique in that it is both a product, and an interrogator, of modernity.

This relationship of anthropology towards modernity has given anthropology its existential doubling, as an extension, and as an undoing, of the taken for granted aspects of Western modernity. For much of the twentieth century, anthropologists worked within the historical framing of modernity and its others, and used ethnographic findings to question the assumed aspects of Euro-American modernity and progress. The second distinctive aspect of anthropology's relation to modernity is as plural modernisms, as a way to capture the particularistic experiences of non-modern or subaltern others in encounters with modern Western forms. The most promising approach has been to treat modernity as a specific ethnographic project, one that tracks the spread of political and social rationalities, and their production of new techniques, social forms, and subjects in a variety of ethnographic settings. Anthropology as a field and an ethnographer's craft is perhaps well suited to identify the ever shifting webs of rationalities that shape our plural worlds, and to pose the question of modernity itself as a paradox about humanity.

2. Modernity and its Others

From its very beginning as an academic discipline, anthropology has dealt with modernity as historical encounters between the modern and the nonmodern, and the social consequences that followed from such transformations. Initially driven by an evolutionary logic, social anthropology was dominated by an opposition between the so-called 'primitive' societies characterized by 'premodern' customs regarding magic, sexuality, and exchange which acted as a foil for modern ideas such as rationality, the Oedipus complex, the nuclear family, and the profit motive. There was also a more radical epistemological project to discover a cultural logic embedded within the native social system, giving it a positive valence that established a rationality alternative to that of European cultures. Anthropology thus studied those aspects of other cultures that stripped away the taken for granted nature of Euro-American modernity, and introduced a reflexive element into the 'science' of human knowledges. This implicit critique of the rational and scientific assumptions of European modernity gradually included the indictment of racism, as research

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conducted in the shadow of European imperialism exposed its destruction of native cultures and its dependence on racism in colonial systems. Claude Lévi-Strauss ruminated on Europe's destruction of the premodern as inseparable from the loss of its own cultural ideals.

In the United States, the pioneers in anthropology participated in debates over the fate of traditional cultures under modern conditions. Nineteenth century 'salvage anthropology' engaged in a valiant attempt to record dying cultures, sometimes rendered in utopian terms. By the early twentieth century, Franz Boas established *cultural* anthropology as a field that spoke out against the human costs of Western conquest, colonialism, and racism. Boas sought to develop a scientific language of cultural differences and universal human dignity as inescapable aspects of modern humanity. During World War II, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict popularized the study of national identities, often contrasting the rationality of American society with premodern others.

In the post-Second World War era, classic social theory in the writings of Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, and Weber replaced earlier evolutionary perspectives on cultural change. Capitalism is now taken as the utterly revolutionary force that has created the modern world by radically breaking with the past. Market civilization tore asunder personal relations, destroyed communal social systems, and introduced egotistical calculations and the modern state to premodern worlds. Thus emerged a strong anthropological tradition to study the varied impact of the capitalist juggernaut on native social forms, subjectivity, and social change.

and the Asia-Pacific became functionally articulated with the capitalist system (Godelier 1977). Ethnographies captured in vivid and concrete detail the parasitic dependence of capitalism on the labor of slaves, sharecroppers, cash-cropping peasants, and women in the developing world. Premodern labor forms and the domestication of women in far away places have historically been part of capitalism, and therefore a part of modernity itself. Forms of servitude such as guest workers and maids, often organized along gender, ethnic, and national lines, are an integral part of advanced capitalist societies. These cultural others furnish the images of the premodern Other to contemporary capitalism's own self-reflection.

The concept of commodity fetishism influenced ethnographic studies of how the market, bureaucracy, and mechanical media erode and reform indigenous notions of sociality and personhood. For over a century, anthropologists have decried the destruction or debasement of native cultures that came with capitalism, Christianity, and foreign rule. Anthropologists have documented the social despair, millennial movements, and rituals of violence inspired by missionaries, travelers, and traders. Another perspective mines the folklore and magical beliefs of colonized peoples for their hidden critique of the objectifying meanings of capitalism. The fetishization of market goods creates conditions for social competition, and gives rise to new hierarchies along lines of town and country, class and gender differences. Across the world, the mass production of culture, including soap operas and beauty contests, engender a variety of cultural configurations, displacing revolutionary sentiments with new desires and confusion.

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2.1 Commodity Production and Fetishism

Most scholars would agree that modernity began with the original capitalist transformations in the North Atlantic world, and their effects on the direction and limits of social change for all of humanity. For Marxist anthropologists, the most resonant story was the ways peoples of the new and ancient worlds were displaced and compelled to engage in commodity production. The works of Eric Wolf (1982) and Sidney Mintz (1985) show that exploitative market relations transformed colonized peoples into new kinds of alienated human beings, as commodity relations dissolved preexisting cultural relations among people, uprooting them from former ways of life.

A significant contribution of anthropology is to show that the market system, contrary to Marx and Karl Polanyi, did not gradually replace all other social forms, but rather interacted with other social systems in the differentiation of modern society. The 'modes of production' school demonstrated that kinship- and community-based systems in Africa, Latin America,

2.2 Modernity and the Spread of Rationality

The Weberian view in anthropology dealt with the universal diffusion of the peculiar social rationalities of Western capitalism to traditional societies. Like much of the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s, Weberian-inflected anthropology was framed by a modernization theory which ranked societies according to the degree of their adoption of modern Western values and institutions. In a series of studies on Indonesia, Clifford Geertz (1963) observed that the limited adoption of rational values and entrepreneurial forms such as capital accounting 'stranded' a country seemingly poised to take off into industrial capitalism. Geertz observed that Javanese cultural and economic spheres were firmly integrated by an overriding communal ethos that thwarted the rise of individualism and impersonal relations required by market organization. The Weberian assumption that economic rationalization would be gradually split off from other spheres was itself challenged by studies of advanced capitalist societies. Marshall Sahlins (1976)

argued that in American society, practical reason can be shown to be informed by religious and aesthetic schemes of meaning. But clearly, the project to decenter certain dominant Western conceptions of humanity must be embedded in an analysis of how these schemes of meaning are transformed in relation to the power dynamics of class, gender, and race.

3. The New Modernisms

By the early 1980s, the end of the Cold War spelled the decline of universalizing theories of modernization, and new generations of anthropologists rejected the totalizing, evolutionary assumptions about social change. The writings of Michael Foucault, and the rediscovery of Nietzsche, popularized understanding about the intimate relations between knowledge and power and focused intellectual projects not on things but on the conditions of emergence of new forms that have been built into the conduct of life. Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1970) first sets out the ways knowledge/power schemes shape and normalize objects of knowledge, and his later works have had a powerful effect on anthropology's analytical techniques and self-perception.

But the so-called postmodern challenge, and an influential text, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus and Fischer 1986), became symptomatic of the misrepresentation of the crisis of knowledge as simply a 'crisis of representation.' The self-reflexive turn caused many to scale down their anthropological project to an experiment in writing ethnography. First, a 'politics and poetics' of representation approach seeks to redress the temporal and political inequalities between ethnographic informants and the anthropologist (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Second, feminists—concerned about partial truths and informant empowerment—popularized multivocality to undercut the authority of the author. Third, a radical deconstructionist approach privileges language and writing over the theorizing of social forms. Such ethnographies seek to capture the jarring experiences of colonial and proletarian subjects, both to uncover the hidden 'truths' of subaltern suffering and resistance, and to subvert objectifying categories of description. Fourth, the so-called 'culture/power/history' orientation takes modernity as a historical cultural formation, embedding the study of discourses and cultural politics within the specific political economic contexts. These varied approaches seek to capture the particular conjunctures and disjunctures of discourse, culture, and power in encounters with Western power and knowledge. But unlike experimental ethnographies of earlier generations, the current postmodernist assault on the ideological constitution of Western social science does not offer an alternate method for studying schemes of practice, their logics and limits, and possibilities for transformation. Thus, postmodern approaches represent a

detour in the anthropological theory of modernity. They do not develop a positive concept of modernity or analytical categories that can be applied to the systematic study of social forms that will allow for theoretical generalization.

4. Modernity as Political and Social Rationalities

The anthropological focus on modernity as an ethnographic problem in its own right was stimulated by recent European social thought. In American anthropology, with the help of his American interlocutors Herbert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault's *oeuvre* came to have a wide-ranging influence on different approaches to questions of modernity. The fundamental question was not to treat modernity as an analytical opposition to given ethnographic realities, but rather to take modernity itself as an ethnographic object, as specific social and political rationalities configuring particular worlds.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) has been especially influential in the anthropological analysis of modern power. We can identify three conceptual clusters: (a) a positive (not repressive) 'capillary' notion of modern power as circulating practices arising from multiple domains; (b) the role of knowledge/power schemes in proliferating social norms and forms that produce subjects; and (c) the specific technologies of governmentality—grids of knowledge/power, mechanisms of surveillance— that govern our everyday behavior and make us particular kinds of modern human beings. Such a reconceptualization of modernity as projects and schemes of power is particularly suited to the ethnographic method of tracking the logics of everyday attitudes, habits, and practices (Bourdieu 1977). It becomes apparent that the goal is not to arrive at some grand theory about modernity, but rather to scrutinize the concrete manifestations of emerging social practices, norms, and cultural politics in relation to the market, the nation-state, and to globalizing forces.

4.1 Alternative Modernities

The Foucault effect on thinking about colonialism and postcolonialism shifts attention from reactionary cultural formations to strategic modern projects. More attention is now given to social rationalities—law, hygiene, sex, and labor disciplines—involved in civilizing colonized societies and subjects. The study of postcolonial development itself is reconceptualized as regimes of discursive power that have material effects on shaping the politics for remaking the Third World (Escobar 1995). The anthropology of imaginary modernities—narratives that depend on the creation of the otherness of their own pasts as well as of the West—show that in the new China, different generations have been shaped by visions of a movement

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The concept of 'alternative modernities' risks reifying native views of modernity, and it will have more purchase if ethnographic attention is also paid to the specific social practices and forms that are distinctively modern. For instance, anthropologists note that the obsessive promotion of marginal cultural practices may engender a 'spectacular modernity' in societies greatly transformed by industrial capitalism and deeply anxious about the loss of national identity.

More grounded approaches have explored the disciplining effects of agricultural programs and bureaucracy in shaping developing societies (Ferguson 1990). Others consider how modernity becomes a state project in developing and postsocialist countries, focusing on the interactions between the market and other social systems that discipline civil society. Such ethnographies demonstrate how the novel forms of governmentality and governance, evolving in relation to globalizing forces, are dialectically linked to self-descriptions of alternative configurations of modernity.

4.2 Modern Schemes and Subjectivity

In *French Modern* (1989) Paul Rabinow opens up the space between the high cultures of modernity and the experiences of ordinary life as a domain of 'middling modernity' where social technologies encounter and regulate everyday sensibility. By seeking the coming into being of modernity in the mundane details of daily life, ethnographers present a complex picture of how the nondramatic norms and forms are constitutive of what it means to be human in particular societies. Perhaps anthropologists have gone further than other social scientists not only in grounding modernity as a particular set of rationalizing norms and practices, but also to specify the locations of different kinds of rationality in modern, universalizing institutions. Ethnographic scrutiny delineates how different regimes of power/knowledge have identified, processed, and constituted particular kinds of modern subjects in runaway factories, hospitals, and scientific laboratories and in utopian cities. Thus, modernity as an object of anthropological inquiry itself is a shifting target, as anthropologists track specific technologies in a range of ethnographic situations, and allow for comparison beyond cultural particularities.

4.3 Cities and the Reconfiguring of Citizenship

The metropolis, as Benjamin and Simmel have noted, is the *locus classicus* of modern sociality, the setting for the most extreme expressions of individual freedom and impersonal objectification. Earlier anthropological studies of urban life focused on the retention of village bonds among migrants or the maintenance of ego-centered networks among working class communities, as a defense against the alienating effects of modernity's flux. Indeed, more and more, cities rather than nations have become the salient sites for examining the gap between political citizenship and the experiences of different categories of persons who have been excluded or subordinated within the ideal national community. A central problem in conceptualizing modernity then is an ethnographic investigation of the mechanisms and routines of governance and the practices of subjects being thus constituted as administrative subjects of particular cities, zones, and nation-states.

There has been a spate of ethnographies on immigrants, drug-addicts, prisoners, street-persons, youths, the working poor, and racial minorities protesting their illusory juridical status and exclusions from the 'liberal community.' Generations of anthropologists have studied black ghetto culture and poor urban neighborhoods, stressing the differential forms of integration into American society. More recent works explore how marginalized urban groups formulate their demands for substantive rights—to schooling, housing, clean water, cultural difference, and respect—from the state and fellow citizens in Western democracies (Holston 1998). A concept of citizenship, not simply as imposed rights for abstract individuals, but as a set of contingent, negotiative relations between local authorities and self-making subjects, suggests a distinctly modern form of state-subject relations and subject-making.

4.4 Transnationalism, Differentiation, and Subject Formation

Of course, the modern condition now includes the proliferation of transnational networks that are transforming earlier understandings about community, mobility, and belonging. In our globalized world, modernity is increasingly understood and experienced in terms of transnational processes and webs of relationships shaped by the intensified flows of people, images, knowledge, and practices in everyday life. Such reconfigurations of social life and connections unsettle earlier anthropological notions of culture, community, and identity, suggesting that it may be possible to talk about a global ecumene spawned by intensified cross-border flows and exchanges (Hannerz 1992). An approach to the cultural dimensions of globalization (Appadurai 1996) suggests that the spatial and imagined coordinates of culture and community are now shaped by diasporic communities that are in the process of becoming 'postnational.' The

category of the transnational imaginary, however, is an indeterminable unit of analysis, and the visions of global companies, multilateral agencies, and diasporic networks are all rather different. The voluntary flows of tourists, intellectuals, expatriates, and businessmen should be theoretically distinguished from the forced homelessness of migrant workers and refugees.

How are such imagined communities constituted in relation to the variety of social systems that have been produced and proliferated by globalization? Accelerated border flows have multiplied specific configurations of subsystems that go to make up particular worlds. While sociologists have focused on the materiality of the new technologies—time–space compression and time–space distanciation—anthropologists seek to sharpen questions about what new modern cultural forms and subjects are emerging in different places, and what alternative cultural logics may be at work (Ong 2000). Transnational institutions and formations privilege new kinds of corporate subjects who internalize the norms of mobility, flexibility, and competitiveness (Martin 1994). A further direction investigates the rationalities that go into the invention of new techniques, practices, objects, places, and subjects, configurations in which the meaning of 'the human' is problematized (Rabinow 1998). Such projects will require us to go beneath the rhetoric of globalization and engage in multisited ethnography that can track the performative and migratory aspects of rationalities—in science, medicine, business, bureaucracy—that are shaping modern subjectivity in a variety of domains. Attention to new forms of governmentality enables us to ask what kinds of rules we have set up for ourselves to be considered modern human beings.

4.5 Living with Uncertainty

But the operation of rationalities is incomplete and contingent, and globalization has proliferated risks—volatile cash flows, unsettling information, diseases, toxic wastes, light arms, and bioscientific innovations—that expose everyone to the irrationalities of modernity. Capitalism has intensified the dominance of space and proliferated the social forms of modernity. Thus, in a world where the globalization of contingency is 'modern society's main attribute' (Luhmann 1998), our thinking needs to go beyond simply the perception and containment of risk. What remains to be investigated is how risks enter into the calculations of everyday life not as an independent but as a dependent variable.

There are signs that the future directions of an anthropology of modernity will concern itself with how societies and individuals live with uncertainties and absorb risks in their everyday routines. What do modern people problematize in their everyday life, and

how do they solve problems? In the intersecting realms of health, science, morality, and capitalism, for instance, anthropologists have explored the ways people cope with the AIDS pandemic, the threats of nuclear plants, and the politics and moral perils of human genomic research. The study of divergent human fate as well will attend to how heterogeneous social spaces—global cities, production zones, blighted borderlands, postsocialist formations, refugee camps, and cross-border networks—are experimenting with different ways for ordering human sociality.

While the anthropology of modernity has a shifting target—the particularistic configurations of contemporary social life—there is a fundamental unity in the ethnographic diagnosis of the particular techniques, norms, and practices that go into the constitution of modern human subjects in specific fields of power. The ethnographic method is ideal for identifying new devices, arrangements, and techniques, and for attending to the performative aspects of emerging practices within an actor-network formulation (Latour and Woolgar 1986 [1979]). Our methodology as well must absorb the uncertainties of our human science, and theory must be based in an ever-widening spiral of observations beyond the immediate field situation. The challenge is for anthropologists to wed an ethnographic analysis of the practicable, strategic features we take to be characteristic of modern society with their interpretive, moral aspects.

For all the self-reflection and criticism, the project of anthropology remains one of a rigorous and systematic exposition of emerging worlds. Such a methodology—whether to study the interactions of functions systems, modes of ruling, modalities of subject-formation, biotechnological development, or the management of risks they all entail—allows for linking the particular with the general, the local with the global, the structural with the interpretive dimensions of modernity. By identifying the social and political rationalities constituting our plural worlds, we may ask whether we want to remain the kinds of human beings we have become. Modernity is both the condition and the decision about the future.

See also: Globalization and World Culture; Globalization, Anthropology of; Modernity; Modernity: History of the Concept; Modernization and Modernity in History; Modernization, Sociological Theories of; Multinational Corporations; Rationality in Society; Sex Differences in Pay

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A. Ong

Modernity: History of the Concept

In the social sciences, the term 'modernity'—or *modernité, modernità, Moderne*—in this form has been employed only very recently. Publications with this title have flourished only during the last two decades of the twentieth century. However, the sociological use of 'modernity' could draw on earlier concepts with the same root, in particular 'modern society' and 'modernization,' key terms in sociological work from the 1960s and 1970s drawing on related usage from certainly the nineteenth century onwards. It is therefore against the background of the broader meaning of the term 'modern' that the more recent usage of 'modernity' in the social sciences needs to be understood.

The social sciences of the early post-Second World War decades—often also known under the self-awarded label 'modern social sciences'—worked with the assumption that contemporary Western societies had emerged from earlier social configurations by way of a profound rupture. This rupture, although it could stretch over long periods and occurred in different societies at different points in time, regularly brought about a new set of institutions, most importantly a market-based economy, a democratic polity, and autonomous knowledge-producing institutions developing empirical-analytical sciences. Once such 'modern society' was established, a superior form of social organization was reached that contained all it needed to adapt successfully to changing circumstances. Thus, there would be no further major social transformation.

During the 1980s, it was exactly this key conviction of the modern social sciences that was challenged by the idea of 'post-modernity,' often understood as the assertion that Western societies had recently turned into an entirely new form of social configurations, based on novel forms of social bond. As such, the assertion was most prominently made in Lyotard's (1979) 'report on knowledge' titled *The Postmodern Condition*, but as a hypothesis of an ongoing major social transformation it has guided much sociological research since. In the course of the ensuing debate, further assumptions of the 'modern social sciences' and of their diagnosis of the contemporary social world were questioned. The term 'modernity' entered into the social sciences in response to such questioning.

1. The Advent of Modernity as a Rupture in Historical Consciousness

In its derivation from Latin, 'modern' is first of all a temporal term. It refers to the present—to be modern means to be within one's own time—and it implies a rather strong distinction of this present from the past. There are, however, three distinct ways of relating the present to the past by use of this term. First, most neutrally, 'modern' could refer to just what happens to be present: in this sense it would mean nothing else but 'contemporary.' Second, 'modern' could be used to deplore the loss of the greatness of the past. Such usage was common until, and including, the Renaissance. Third, the arrival of the 'modern' could be seen as an accomplishment, an overcoming of the limitations of the past.

In this latter form, the term was made prominent in *La quérelle des anciens et des modernes* in the seventeenth century. From then onwards, most of the uses of the term have retained such strong temporal implication, the later concept of 'modern society' being a key example. Drawing such distinction between eras, however, also demands specification as to how they differ, that is, a conceptualization of what is modern. Such conceptualization regularly transcends historical time, and thus invites analyses that go beyond the initial preference for the present over the