

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN SCHUTZIAN PERSPECTIVE

[A]n anthropologist who would describe the ceremony of a primitive tribe merely in terms of overt behavior without any reference to its subjective meaning could not decide whether this ceremony is a preparation for war or just a dance in order to honor a deity, for a barter trade or for the reception of a friendly ambassador.¹

217

Introduction

Even the briefest extension of the *Wissenschaftslehre* of Alfred Schutz (1899–1959) must include cultural anthropology. Unlike such disciplines as archaeology and nursing, there are multiple references in Schutz to this science. There are no references in Schutz's published work thus far to Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, or Franz Boas, all in New York during his time, but there are references to Ralph Linton's *Two Ethnological Reports* (1939) and also Abram Kardiner's *The Individual and his Society: The Psychodynamics of Primitive Social Organization* (1939). Schutz suggested that the latter's concept of basic personality, »so skillfully used for the understanding of primitive cultures, actually aims at the typification of the structural features of the stock of knowledge at hand, although certainly in a

1 Alfred Schutz, »Positivistic Philosophy and the Actual Approach of Interpretive Social Science: An Ineditum from Spring 1953«, ed. Lester Embree, *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 14, p. 138.

rather inadequate way«² and mentions the former figure for modern anthropology along with »Parsons-Shils« in modern sociology with respect to »ascription and achievement as basic determinants of status and role expectations within the social system.«³

In an as yet unpublished text, however, namely, »T. S. Eliot's Theory of Culture« (1950, to be published), Schutz does refer to Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) as a »remarkable book« and also writes in general that

it turns out that culture is just everything which is taken for granted by a given social group at a certain point of its historical existence. This includes not only the things classed by certain anthropologists under the unfortunate terms *artifacts* (tools and implements), *sociofacts* (institutions), and *mentifacts* (ideas and ideals), not only the permanently reproduced and managed »second environment« which, according to [Bronislaw] Malinowski, is superimposed upon the primary or natural environment by human activity and the sum total of habitual and traditional life. It also includes the whole realm of things taken for granted as well as the system of relevances and their organization, upon which the belief is founded that this way of life is unquestionably the good one and the right one, perhaps the only good and right one. What characterizes the natural aspect of the world for the in-group is not that all this knowledge is *unconscious* <as Eliot claims>, but that as a whole and in its details, it is »taken for granted beyond question.« It is taken for granted beyond question because the motives from which this belief had originated have been forgotten in the course of history and in the course of transmitting such beliefs from generation to generation.

218

Schutz thus had some familiarity with the cultural anthropology of his time.

Not surprisingly, it appears that for Schutz cultural anthropology is chiefly concerned with primitive culture. He comes close to asserting this in »The Stranger« where he first says that »the term 'stranger' shall mean an adult individual of our times and civilization who tries to be permanently accepted or at least tolerated by the group he approaches«⁴ and then adds on the next page that »primitives« are excluded from his theme. »Primitive« is thus opposed to »civilized«, which is

2 Alfred Schutz, *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*, ed. Richard M. Zaner, Yale University Press, New Haven 1970, p. 102.

3 Alfred Schutz, »Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World« (1955), reprinted in *Collected Papers*, Vol. II, ed. Alvid Broederssen, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1964, p. 242. Hereafter this volume referred to as »II.«

4 Alfred Schutz, »The Stranger« (1944), II 91.

to say contemporary Western civilization (but there are references elsewhere to »classic Chinese thought«⁵ and thus implicitly another civilization).

More substantially, the following from Schutz could easily have been written by a cultural anthropologist about primitive societies.

Everywhere we find sex groups and age groups; and some division of labor conditioned by them; and more or less rigid kinship organizations that arrange the social world into zones of varying social distance, from intimate familiarity to strangeness. Everywhere we also find hierarchies of superordination and subordination, of leader and follower, of those in command and those in submission. Everywhere, too, we find an accepted way of life, that is, a conception of how to come to terms with things and men, with nature and the supernatural. There are everywhere, moreover, cultural objects, such as tools needed for the domination of the outer world, playthings for children, articles for adornment, musical instruments of some kind, objects serving as symbols for worship. There are certain ceremonies marking the great events in the life cycle of the individual (birth, initiation, marriage, death), or the rhythm of nature (sowing and harvesting, solstices, etc.) (II 229)

Schutz does not himself offer a theory of cultural anthropology, but the beginnings of a theory of cultural anthropology in his style will be ventured here under the rubrics of (1) disciplinary definition, (2) basic concepts, and (3) distinctive methods. Information on the current state of this science will be chiefly drawn from an introductory textbook, namely, *Anthropology*, by Barbara D. Miller and Bernard Wood.⁶ Like most introductions to anthropology, this text also introduces biological, archaeological, and linguistic subdisciplines of anthropology, i.e., the other three of the traditional »four fields«, but cultural anthropology in the strict signification is distinct.

219

Disciplinary definition

From Schutz's statement that »a philosophical anthropology, in the continental European sense, [is] the science of man — not a science of primitive culture which, in contradistinction to anthropology, is called in Europe ethnology,«⁷ it can be gathered not only that that »cultural anthropology« is not philosophical anthropology for him but also that the alternative title of »ethnology« at least tends to be European rather than American usage and, above all, that the subject

5 Alfred Schutz, »Symbol, Reality, and Society« (1955), reprinted in *Collected Papers*, Vol. I, ed. Maurice Natanson, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1962, p. 334. Hereafter this volume will be referred to as »I.«

6 Pearson Education, Boston 2006.

7 Alfred Schutz, »Santayana on Society and Government« (1952), II 205.

matter of cultural anthropology is, once again, primitive culture. Such a culture is not part of the civilization to which Schutz belonged and on which most other social sciences focus (most societies thematized in the historical sciences are also arguably not parts of current civilization). Even though current cultural anthropology increasingly includes investigation of parts of Western civilization, this focus on primitive culture appears definitive of cultural anthropology for Schutz.

What sort of a cultural science is cultural anthropology? Is it a psychological science, a social science in the strict signification, or an historical science? (That it is a cultural science of some sort does not need discussion.) Here it seems pertinent to quote that the »cultural pattern of group life« in general consists of »all the peculiar valuations, institutions, and systems of orientation and guidance (such as folkways, mores, laws, habits, customs, etiquette, fashions) which, in the common opinion of sociologists of our time, characterize—if not constitute—any social group at a given moment in its history.«⁸ Again, this could as well have been said by a cultural anthropologist.

Considering just folkways further, there is also this passage:

220

The sum-total of the relative natural aspect of the social world has for those living in it constitutes, to use William Graham Sumner's term, the folkways of the in-group, which are socially accepted as the good ways and the right ways for coming to terms with things and fellow-men. They are taken for granted because they have stood the test so far, and, being socially approved, are held as requiring neither an explanation nor a justification.—These folkways constitute the social heritage which is handed down to children born into and growing up within the group. (II 230)

It is once more not difficult to consider this the »common opinion« of cultural anthropologists as well.

If cultural anthropology is chiefly about the cultural pattern of primitive *group life*, then it is not a psychological science, which would focus on individual lives. It would also seem not to be an historical science for, while primitive societies certainly have pasts, these societies are typically nonliterate and their pasts then accessible only through archaeology. By process of elimination, cultural anthropology is then a social science in the strict signification, the one focused on primitive culture.

8 »The Stranger,« II 92.

Basic concepts

That basic concepts (*geisteswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*) are important for Schutz is clear from the very first paragraph of the Preface of *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (1932): »Among these [basic] concepts are those of the interpretation of one's own and others' experiences, meaning-establishment and meaning-interpretation, symbol and symptom, motive and project, meaning adequacy and causal adequacy, and, above all, the nature of ideal-typical concept formation, upon which is based the very attitude of the social sciences toward their subject matter.«⁹

These basic concepts were intended by the philosopher Schutz to hold for all social sciences in the broad signification, i.e., all the cultural sciences. When one turns to cultural anthropology in particular for basic concepts specific to it, one quickly finds that the subject matter of this science appears richer than many other cultural sciences of the social sort, e.g., economics and political science, which thematize only parts of the socio-cultural world. Even sociology, which would seem also to have for Schutz a fairly unrestricted scope, has many aspects of its theme that are unproblematic in the society not only the about which but also the from which of its investigations, e.g., whether the kinship organization includes clans seems not an issue for American sociologists.

221

Schutz was always prepared to learn from the actual work of scientists. Part III, »Contemporary Human Social Variation«, of the textbook of Miller and Wood is a good source for exemplary basic concepts and these are already systematized in its table of contents:

For *economic systems*, there are »foraging«, »horticulture«, »pastoralism«, and »agriculture« and »balanced« and »unbalanced exchange«, the latter including »market exchange«, »gambling«, »theft«, and »exploitation«. For *reproduction and human development*, there are »foraging«, »agricultural«, and »industrial« modes and »infancy«, »childhood«, »adolescence«, and »adulthood«, which vary within and between cultures. *Illness and healing* also take various non-Western forms. Then there are various *kinship systems* and related *domestic arrangements*. Next are *social groups* and *social stratification*. Finally, Miller and Wood analyze *political and legal systems*, which include »bands«, »tribes«, »chiefdoms«, »confederacies«, and »states«, and it is perhaps in this respect that the impacts of so-called civiliza-

9 Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, ILL 1967, p. xxxi. Hereafter, this source will be cited as »PSW.«

tion on so-called primitive societies most conspicuously occur currently.¹⁰ As in other connections, much more can be said about the basic concepts of cultural anthropology from a good beginning like this.

Distinctive methods

All that we have explicitly from Schutz with respect to the approach of cultural anthropology in particular is that experiments hardly possible in it;¹¹ hence it is arguably an observational science. But more can be learned from the science itself and related to Schutz's general methodology or science theory of the social sciences.

While other social sciences in the strict signification rely in part on participant observation (most also rely for data collection on questionnaires sent through the mail and even telephone and email polling), this central reliance in cultural anthropology is part of the whole called »fieldwork« and involves the investigator typically living among her informants in a primitive society for quite a length of time. (Living in the same civilization with one's informants is not the same, although, as intimated, things are changing so that, e.g., a cultural anthropologist might move temporarily to an ethnic enclave within her own society in order to conduct her investigations.)

222

Miller and Wood outline »Research Methods in Anthropology«. The first step is to identify a research topic. Then a location needs to be selected and access to it gained. Equipment such as video recorders and appropriate clothing are needed and »Even with substantial language training in advance, many cultural anthropologists have found that they need to learn a local dialect of the standard version. Many researchers rely on the assistance of local interpreters« (Miller & Wood, p. 115).

Because the culture investigated is as a rule rather different, considerable effort to establish rapport with informants is needed. »When entering the field area, anthropologists should attempt to explain their interest in learning about the people's lives. This seemingly simple goal may be incomprehensible to the local people, especially those who have never heard of cultural anthropology and who cannot imagine why someone would want to study them« (idem).

10 At the end of Part III there is a listing of »Key Concepts«: »authority, band, banditry, big-man or big-woman system, clan, confederacy, critical legal anthropology, critical military anthropology, faction, feuding, influence, in-kind taxation, law, legal pluralism, nation, norm, policing, political organization, power, segmentary model, social control, transnationalism, trial by order, tribe, and war.«

11 Alfred Schutz, »Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences« (1952), I 49.

Moreover, »An anthropologist's class, 'race' or ethnicity, gender, and age may affect how she or he will be welcomed or interpreted by the local people« (ibid., p.116). Finally within the field area, the cultural anthropologist asks questions as well as observes and records what she learns.

The approach of cultural anthropology can be related to what Schutz would advocate for other social sciences in the strict signification. In contrast with ideological thinking, there is respect for logic, clarity, and the value-free theoretical attitude is to be sought. Ultimately, »objective meanings« about »subjective meanings« are constructed, i.e., chiefly what can also be called verifiable scientific outsider interpretations of everyday commonsense insider interpretations or meanings. (This is to take »meaning« to include pre-predicative *Sinne* as well as ideal-typical constructs.)

The subjective or insider and the objective or outsider contrast in the following passage would hold as much for the cultural anthropologist as for the sociologist.

The cultural pattern, like any phenomenon of the social world, has a different aspect for the sociologist and for the man who acts and thinks within it. The sociologist (as sociologist, not as a man among fellow-men which he remains in his private life) is the disinterested scientific onlooker of the social world. He is disinterested in that he intentionally refrains from participating in the network of plans, means- and-ends relations, motives and chances, hopes and fears, which the actor within the social world uses for interpreting his experiences of the social world; as a scientist he tries to observe, describe, and classify the social world as clearly as possible in well-ordered terms in accordance with the scientific ideals of coherence, consistency, and analytical consequence.¹²

223

For a Schutzian cultural anthropologist her science would be, more precisely, the search for scientific ideal types referring to and true chiefly of common-sense ideal types. But what are *ideal types* and which sort or sorts of them are relevant to cultural anthropology for Schutz?

The world, the physical as well as the sociocultural one, is experienced from the outset in terms of types: there are mountains, trees, birds, fishes, dogs, and among them Irish setters; there are cultural objects, such as houses, tables, chairs, books, tools, and among them hammers; and there are typical social roles and relationships, such as parents, siblings, kinsmen, strangers, soldiers, hunters, priests, etc. Thus, typifications on the common-sense level—in contradistinction to typifications made by the scientist, and especially the social scientist—emerge in the everyday experience of the

12 »The Stranger«, loc. cit.

world as taken for granted without any formulation of judgments or of neat propositions with logical subjects and predicates. They belong, to use a phenomenological term, to prepredicative thinking. The vocabulary and the syntax of the vernacular of everyday language represent the epitome of the typifications socially approved by the linguistic group.¹³

As for the species of ideal types employed by the social scientist to interpret the common-sense experience of people in everyday life, Schutz's great emphasis is on personal ideal types, but if cultural anthropology is about cultural patterns of group life, then scientific types of a different sort are called for (cultural anthropology could be added to the list below):

And here we should add that not all the social sciences have as their goal the interpretation of the subjective meaning of products by means of personal ideal types. Some of them are concerned with what we have called course-of-action types. Examples of such social sciences are the history of law, the history of art, and political science. This latter group of disciplines simply takes for granted the lower stages of meaning-establishment and pays no attention to them. Their scientific goal is not to study the process of meaning-establishment but rather the cultural products which are the results of that meaning-establishment. These products are then regarded as meaningful in themselves and are classified into course-of-action types. (PSW 242)

224

(More will be said about ideal types presently.)

Theorizing in anthropological approaches

Cultural anthropology produces rich and detailed factual descriptions often seemingly to the exclusion of general theoretical thinking. This may be why it is often called »ethnography«. But while general thinking is chiefly implicit in Miller and Wood, it is focused on in Philip Carl Salzman, *Understanding Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theory*.¹⁴ Salzman begins with a famous investigation.

Let us consider for a moment how Margaret Mead went about her research. Not what she saw ... but rather the way in which Mead saw Samoa, its people, and their culture. Mead did not come to Samoa with an empty mind like a blank slate or a blank monitor screen, which she would fill with unselected description based upon undirected thought. Rather, Mead came to her Samoan research with a theoretical agenda. That is, her research was guided by theory, which we can define minimally

13 »Equality«, II 233.

14 Waveland Press, Long Grove, IL 2001.

as a general idea that can be applied to many specific instances or particular cases. (Salzman, p. 1)

Salzman considers Mead's theory, which can be put as nurture far outweighing nature in adolescence in Samoa, as a »heuristic theory«, which is to say one that »serves to direct attention to certain factors, thus setting the research agenda and raising certain expectations about likely research findings«, but the propositions in such a theory cannot be »proven or refuted« because they are »general and imprecise« (ibid., p. 2).

In contrast, »substantive theories« for Salzman »are specific and precise enough to test through examination of evidence« (ibid., p. 4).

The social and cultural anthropologists taking a scientific approach envisioned a two-level discipline: there was ethnography, the study of particular, unique societies and cultures; and there was social and cultural anthropology, sometimes called comparative anthropology or ethnology, which aimed at generalizations based upon the comparison or juxtaposition of two or more ethnographic cases. (ibid., p. 8)

Salzman also calls substantive theories »theoretical generalizations«, e.g., »social status continuity and fixed life courses result in emotionally smooth life course transitions, while many social status discontinuities and many life course options result in emotionally disruptive life course transitions« (idem).

225

Salzman devotes the bulk of his book to the approaches of some eight types of anthropological theorists: »functionalists, processualists, materialists, symbolists and structuralists, evolutionists, and feminists and postmodernists« (ibid., p. 127). For example, there is processualism:

Alongside continuing study of normative rules, social structures and institutions, and the functional relations amongst them, grew an interest in people's intentions, the options that they believed they had, the decisions they made, the consequent actions that they took, and the resultant actions of others. There is thus a shift away from thinking of people as acting strictly in terms of their statuses and roles, as if people always conformed to the normative rules. Rather, there was increased recognition that all people acted intentionally, that their intentions sometimes went beyond or outside the normative rules, and that people's actions could change the structures and institutions within which they lived. (ibid., p. 33)

This is convergent with Schutz's descriptions of »in-order-to motives« and »life plans« and the views he accepted about social change.¹⁵ But can it be further related to his science theory?

He writes that »a theory which aims at explaining social reality has to develop particular devices foreign to the natural sciences in order to agree with the common-sense experience of the social world. This is indeed what all theoretical sciences of human affairs—economics, sociology, the sciences of law, linguistics, cultural anthropology, etc.—have done.« (I 58)

The »particular devices« here would be scientific ideal types for Schutz. What is involved with these can be shown with several quotations, the first telling about ideal types themselves and the rest converging on how Schutz would probably have understood processualism and the other »anthropological theories«, e.g., also functionalism and materialism. The following account of typification is influenced by Husserl in his *Ideen* of 1913.

According to our view, ideal types are constructed by postulating certain motives [for example], as fixed and invariant within the range of variation of the actual self-interpretation in which the Ego interprets its own action as it acts. To be sure, this postulation of certain motives as invariant does refer back to previous »experience« (*Erfahrung*). But this is not the »experience« of shallow empiricism. It is rather the immediate prepredicative encounter which we have with any direct object of intuition. The ideal type may, therefore, be derived from many kinds of »experiences« and by means of more than one kind of constituting process. Both »empirical« and eidetic ideal types may be constructed. By empirical we mean »derived from the senses«, and by eidetic we mean »derived from essential insight«. The manner of construction may be abstraction, generalization, or formalization, the principle of meaning-adequacy always, of course, being observed. Our own theory of ideal types, therefore, covers the concepts and propositions of the theoretical social sciences, including those of pure economics. (PSW 244)

[T]he most serious question which the methodology of the social sciences has to answer is: How is it possible to form objective concepts and an objectively verifiable theory of subjective meaning-structures? The basic insight that the concepts formed by the social scientist are constructs of the constructs formed in common-sense thinking by actors on the social scene offers an answer. The scientific constructs formed on the second level, in accordance with the procedural rules valid for all empirical sciences, are objective ideal-typical constructs and, as such, of a different kind from those of common-sense thinking which they have to supersede. They are theoretical systems embodying testable general hypotheses.... This device has been

15 See Lester Embree, »Schutz on Reducing Social Tensions«, in: *Phenomenology of the Political*, edited by Kevin Thompson and Lester Embree, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1999, pp. 81–102.

used by social scientists concerned with theory long before the concept was formed by Max Weber and developed in his school. (I 62)

The principle of relevance, the postulate of subjective interpretation, and that of adequacy, are applicable at each level of social study. For instance, all the historical sciences are governed by them. The next step would be to circumscribe within the social sciences the category of those we call the theoretical ones. The outstanding feature of these theoretical sciences is the interpretation of the social world in terms of a system of determinate logical structure.¹⁶

But where may a scientist find the guarantee for establishing a truly unified system? And where the scientific tools for performing this difficult task? The answer is: Each branch of the social sciences which has reached the theoretical stage contains a fundamental hypothesis both defining its field of research and offering the regulative principles for constructing a system of ideal-types. Such a fundamental hypothesis, for instance, is the utilitarian principle in classical economics and the principle of marginal utility in modern economics. The meaning of this postulate is the following: »Construct your ideal-type as if all actors had oriented their life plans and therefore all their activities on the chief end of achieving the greatest utility with a minimum of costs. Human activity oriented in such a way (and only this kind of human activity) is the subject matter of your science.«¹⁷

Processualism, functionalism, materialism, etc. in cultural anthropology are analogous to classical and marginal-utility economics in economics and the passage quoted about processualism above can be taken as articulating a fundamental hypothesis making a school of anthropological theory theoretical, i.e., »all people acted intentionally, that their intentions sometimes went beyond or outside the normative rules, and that people's actions could change the structures and institutions within which they lived.« From this fundamental hypothesis the science theorist can attempt to explicate the system of testable hypothesis of that cultural-anthropological theory.¹⁸

16 Alfred Schutz, »The Problem of Rationality in the Social World« (1942), II 86.

17 Alfred Schutz, »The Problem of Rationality in the Social World« (1940, Earlier Version), in: Alfred Schutz, Collected Papers, vol. IV, ed. Helmut Wagner, George Psathas, and Fred Kersten, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1996, p. 23.

18 Schutz may have the notion of »fundamental hypothesis« from Husserl: »In the world perceptible by our senses, changes in the spatio-temporal positions of solids, changes in their form and fullness, are not accidental and indifferent, but they are dependent on each other in sensuously *typical* ways. The basic style of our visible immediate world is empirical. This universal, and indeed causal, style makes possible hypotheses, inductions, and predictions, but in pre-scientific life they all have the character of the approximate and typical. ... Only when the ideal objectivities become substituted for the empirical things of the corporeal world, only when one abstracts or co-idealizes the intuitable fullness, which is not capable of <direct> mathematization, does the *fundamental hypothesis* of the entire realm of mathematical natural science result, namely, that a universal inductivity might prevail in the intuitable world, an inductivity which suggests itself in everyday experience but which remains concealed in its infinity.« (»Phenomenology and the Social Sciences« [1940], I 129)

*
* *

To close, it may be remarked that Alfred Schutz's emphasis was on the methods of collection of data from informants and how theoretical accounts relate to such data, but he would very likely have enjoyed conversations with theorists such as those whom Salzman characterizes. In any case, a Schutzian theory of cultural anthropology would need to recognize the level of theorizing. And besides methods, such a theory of a particular science would need to consider the disciplinary definition and the basic concepts of the actual science.

This essay is only intended to show how a Schutzian theory of cultural anthropology might be developed and the great reliance on introductory textbooks in it indicates that much deeper reflection remains to be conducted.