

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4260-8810>

Andrzej Zaporowski

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu
Wydział Nauk Społecznych
e-mail: az@amu.edu.pl

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE. A PARTICULAR CASE

Abstract: This essay addresses the idea of perspective as it is suggested by C. Geertz. This idea presupposes that (wo)man interacts with the surrounding physical world while taking separate yet overlapping positions grounded in such frames as common-sense, aesthetics, religion, science, and others. The author proposes to introduce another perspective which speaks for a unique frame which (wo)man composes while interacting with other (wo)men. This is an anthropological perspective framed as a particular case. The author refers to a number of American anthropologists who directly or indirectly yet critically appeal to Geertz's heritage to show what is necessary to compose the foundations of the perspective in question. In this respect, G. Marcus's and M. Fischer's crisis of representation, L. Abu-Lughod's the particular, J. Limón's modernity-postmodernity relation, and P. Rabinow's, A. Stavrianakis's and J. Faubion's triad of the present, the actual and the contemporary is discussed. The author offers a model to analyse the interaction in question. At the same time, the author suggests that the anthropological perspective should be understood in terms of self-awareness and complexity to approach other (wo)men creatively and critically.

Keywords: perspective, action, crisis of representation, the particular, modern–postmodern, the contemporary

Introduction

In one of his essays, Clifford Geertz extensively utilized the term “perspective”.¹ His aim was to find a possibly accurate tool to present the way in which (wo)man as a cultural and social creature copes with the challenges of the physical world. Although Geertz focused on religion, his analysis covered also other areas of human conduct.

¹ C. Geertz, *Religion as a Cultural System* [in:] C. Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York 1973, pp. 87–125.

These included common-sense, aesthetics, science and the domain of the bizarre. In fact, the American anthropologist was interested in what conditioned human actions, where this factor is commonly named as disposition or attitude (including the propositional one). However, he was suspicious about the supposedly mental affiliation of the terms “attitude” and “disposition.” He therefore proposed the term “perspective” to underline the social and physical context of (wo)man’s interaction with the surrounding realm. I do not share Geertz’s view on the subjective nature of, particularly, attitudes; I consider them in intersubjective terms while at the same time approaching the mental realm semantically and not ontologically. I respect, however, his position and am going to follow his understanding of the term in question in this essay. My aim is to distinguish an anthropological perspective among those identified by Geertz. I am going to appeal to how he understood anthropology, and to experimentally group the voices of those whose research is a direct or indirect, and simultaneously critical, testimony to the heritage of his work. I want to relate these voices – while being aware of their limited number – one to another to show how complex the nature of the perspective in question is. At the same time, I wish to show the possible openness of this perspective, that is, to suggest that although it is Geertz’s vocabulary which makes its construction possible, the very perspective allows one to go beyond what Geertz himself identified. On the other hand, the anthropological perspective should testify to what was essential for Geertz, that is, human interaction.

Geertz

In Geertz’s view, (wo)man is taken to be, among other things, a two dimensional creature, where these dimensions complement one another. The first dimension is called the world view and is of an intellectual nature, while the second, called ethos, is of an emotional nature. As (wo)men are plunged into the world of physical events, their world view and ethos mutually reinforce, so that the conduct of humans is not only ordered but also complex. Such a reinforcement results in turn in (wo)man’s particular orientation, which Geertz calls perspective. He defines it as “a mode of seeing, in that extended sense of ‘see’ in which it means ‘discern’, ‘apprehend’, ‘understand’ or ‘grasp’”.² The term “perspective” turns out to be a synonym of the term “attitude” largely used in especially philosophical discourse when one speaks about propositional attitudes like belief, intention or assessment, which are taken with reference to propositions, that is, the meanings of sentences. On the other hand, also modernity or solidarity are called attitudes. However, Geertz attributes mental nature to the term “attitude”, and writes: “(...) I have avoided it because of its strong subjectivist connotations, its tendency to place the stress upon a supposed inner state of an actor rather than on a certain sort of relations – a symbolically mediated one – between an

² Ibidem, p. 110.

actor and a situation”.³ Still, he takes perspective as the way (wo)man orders his/her actions and adds that this way is manifested socially through symbols. These can be objects, actions, events, qualities or relationships. The ordered nature of such items turns out to be asserted since one learns that the meaning of symbol is what Geertz calls conception.

Geertz discusses the common-sense, aesthetic, religious and scientific perspective. Each of them addresses a distinct yet complementary fragment of human experience. (Wo)man is capable of replacing one perspective with another due to the challenges (wo)man copes with at a given moment. Generally, adopting a perspective by (wo)man means (wo)man’s ability to make a judgement on something. Only the aesthetic perspective is exceptional, for its purpose is to meditate the beauty of the realm experienced; in this respect (wo)man withdraws from any trial to assess what is observed. In all other cases (wo)men take a position to orient themselves towards problems faced. The common-sense perspective is of a practical nature and corresponds to the most widely shared knowledge which the ancient Greeks called *doxa*. For example, it is hardly deniable by community members that the sun rises earlier and sets later in Summer than in Winter in the Northern Hemisphere. In this respect, this perspective refers to situations which are within the reach of (wo)man’s senses. So does the aesthetic perspective. Both the religious and scientific perspectives differ in that they are designed to respond to what transcends the human sensual experience. The former relies on its dogmas to keep (wo)man firm, especially in the case of suffering. The latter requires critical judgement based on “(...) deliberate doubt and systematic inquiry (...)”.⁴ When confronted with the common-sense perspective, this perspective corresponds to *episteme*, that is, accurate or verified knowledge. For example, a scientist perfectly knows that the sun does not rise nor set as such. Geertz’s very idea is that the perspectives mentioned (and all the remaining ones) do not conflict one with another but form a bunch, which allows (wo)men to orient themselves in various overlapping situations.

It does not mean that one cannot experience a tension between particular perspectives. Let me recall a difference between one’s holding that the sun rises and sets and one’s holding that it does not. This might suggest excluding one possibility for the sake of the other. However, the very practical interest and convenience of the former is acceptable as long as one solves the problems of the small scale. In such a situation, (wo)man’s calculations may and indeed are quite accurate. It also shows that long lasting vocabulary suggesting, for example, that the sun rises or a book dropped falls may be useful even if much more accurate terms are offered. The point is not to show (wo)man as a critic who always holds a privileged position from which to judge other positions, but to present a multidimensional creature who is simultaneously a product and a producer of a series of interactions with the world. In this sense it is worth ask-

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 111.

ing where to place an anthropologist's practice. Is one entitled to claim that it is a result of one's adopting a scientific perspective? Or should one just agree that one who practices the Humanities is not a scientist? And if yes to this, then where to locate the anthropologist? When discussing the Foucaultian author-function problem in another text, Geertz makes comparisons between literature, anthropology and science.⁵ When doing so he borrows a famous Wittgensteinian expression "family resemblances" to name the relations among them. (I think that this expression perfectly fits the condition of the bunch of perspectives.) He then confronts a novelist with a physicist and asks if the anthropological practice (in fact, writing) is closer to the former or to the latter. The answer is that the anthropologist is the mule rather than the horse or the donkey, and so represents a similar yet distinct mode of action. Imagine then that an anthropological perspective emerges.

Context

When introducing the term "perspective" to refer to human interaction I want to distinguish between the practical and the theoretical dimension of this interaction. A (wo)man may take a particular perspective to assess or judge her/his counterpart's action, and more generally, orient towards it. It is of secondary importance if (s)he does this consciously or not. The very study of propositional attitudes, which remind one of Geertz's perspectives, prove that human actions conditioned by such attitudes are already ordered despite being realized. Therefore such an orienting does not require any conceptual apparatus to be successfully performed. However, if one wants to reflectively refer to this process through either interpretation or explanation, one has to construct a conceptual apparatus which is represented or expressed by a series of relevant terms. In this article I use the word "perspective" as one of such terms. My aim is to analyze a particular condition which is responsible for an organized conduct of an interactional unit. I associate the word in question with the word "anthropological", for my analysis aims at one among other forms – yet a unique form – of this unit. This is why this word is accompanied with the indefinite article "an". If one considers an anthropologist as an actor who participates in an interaction (process), one should frame this actor both practically and theoretically. What I call "an anthropological perspective" speaks for such a frame where the anthropologist possibly reflects on what (s)he experiences. There is, however, a plenitude of cases of reflections associated with this creature by various theorists. What I want to do is to refer to a particular case, which is as contingent as empirical and as arbitrary as informative. I aim at placing it in a very special moment of the transformation of a discipline to show how flexible anthropological reflection can be.

I take Geertz as an interesting example for he is one of those who (historically) distinguished (cultural or social) anthropology or ethnology as a semiotic discipline.

⁵ Idem, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1988.

The point is not to deny anthropology's empirical nature, but to allow the anthropologist or ethnologist "to be (...) not (...) in search of law but (...) in search of meaning".⁶ On the other hand, such a search entails not only a continuous tension between the linguistic and the metalinguistic level but also the very literary practice of both registering and reflecting on what has been registered. One can find, then, that the anthropologist (ethnologist) is some way between a scientist formulating laws and a novelist composing texts. The very concept of meaning – which is simultaneously so ambiguous a concept – proves there is something between supposedly pure imagination and possibly pure verification. This is why I want to examine what it could mean to take the anthropologist as the "mule" in question. However, I am aware that the very term "perspective" should not be attributed solely to Geertz; and I do not simply mean a common-sense context of this term. I mean, among other things, a largely shared position called perspectivism as discussed by, for example, Heonik Kwon.⁷ Still, in this article I do not identify Geertz's standpoint with the position in question. It is not because I do not see any similarities between the American social anthropologist and those appealing to perspectivism. What I aim at is distinguishing between two sorts of analysis. Sort 1 means that a researcher uses the term "perspective" to name or frame some external problem (so operates at a metalinguistic level). Sort 2 amounts to one's naming or framing the researcher's very conduct of investigation (therefore one's being on the meta-metalinguistic level). I opt for the former not to ignore the significance of the latter; I do it since I am aware of a limited space of my presentation.

However, what I opt for is also significant, and it is because of the moment in question. As I have just pointed out, Geertz shifts his attention to the realm of meaning. The already mentioned tension between what an anthropologist experiences in the field and what (s)he constructs as a report of this experience undermines the very idea of representation, that is, the validity of the anthropological report. This is why I take the textual turn in the 1980s as not only an essential moment of the transition of anthropology but also as the result of its interpretive mode of investigation. This in turn results in questioning the balance of the self-other relation, and raising, among other things, the problem of native anthropology as pictured by the late 1980s and early 1990s. Finally, some of those who contributed to the textual turn realized that not only the residual forms like (say, Polynesian) communities but the emergent forms like new technologies (say, synthetic biology) could be proper candidates for fieldwork investigation at the turn of the 20th and 21st century. This does not mean that another scope or form, and place and time of research could not be enumerated. However, a possibly small portion of data orderly collected can allow one to have a satisfactory insight into what I am interested in, that is, human interaction, where

⁶ Idem, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* [in:] *The Interpretation...*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁷ H. Kwon, *Perspectivism in Social Anthropology*, "NatureCulture" 2012, no. 01, pp. 59–68.

this insight addresses a specific, yet fundamental process of transformation of the discipline. This is why I narrow my investigation to the American (or the US) locale between the 1980s and 2010 to link the three units just presented. I do this while taking an anti-essentialist or constructivist position. I therefore collect the appropriate data – the American anthropologists’ solutions to the problems they have identified – to construct a particular (and possibly simplified) model to allow one to “look at” human interaction from a particular perspective. Moreover, what is essential is that this model is of a hypothetical nature.

Marcus and Fischer

It is not an accident that I refer to two American cultural anthropologists, George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer now, for it is them who hugely contributed to what I call the textual turn in anthropology in the 1980s.⁸ While analysing the history of the discipline, they recognized more and more the visible tension between the object investigated and the tool of investigation, resulting in what they coined as a crisis of representation. In fact, the turn in question was to answer the need of reformulating the role of a text and its author representing the cultural realm. In this respect the anthropologist was to undergo a process of self-reflection called cultural critique, whose purpose was to allow the anthropologist to reorient their position toward the object of investigation – the other. However, the problem identified was of a broader nature. The American anthropologists plunged into a debate over the epistemological claims to represent, which have lasted since at least Immanuel Kant’s critique of knowledge. I myself once linked Marcus’s and Fischer’s position with Friedrich Nietzsche’s analysis of truth as a metaphor.⁹ The German post-Kantian philosopher claimed, inter alia, that human knowledge and the resulting communication suffered from an incommensurability between the general nature of abstract objects to represent, that is a concept, and the individual nature of concrete objects represented, that is the thing. One should remember that the Nietzschean model takes a form of two metaphors. The first amounts to the transformation of a physical (nervous) stimulus into a mental image, and the second – to the transformation of this image into a physical sound, be it a word. This word in turn expresses a concept to denote a set of things, and not just any individual thing. It should become obvious, Nietzsche argued, that the word omitted to represent what caused the stimulation, and that a speaker may fail to be correctly understood by a hearer.

Marcus and Fischer noticed that such a crisis is of a cyclical nature. When appealing to a historian, Hayden White, they focused on a figure of irony. Accord-

⁸ G.E. Marcus, M.M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London 1986.

⁹ A. Zaporowski, *Thick Description and the Crisis of Representation – an Anthropological Study*, trans. by R. Jantarski, “Studia Semiotyczne – English Supplement” 2015, vol. 27, pp. 135–144.

ing to White, “nineteen-century historical writing (...) began and ended in an ironic mode”.¹⁰ The cycle meant not a simple repetition; it was designed in a rather spiral fashion. In this respect, a lesson learned from a previous period served as a not satisfactory means to cope with a new problem in different circumstances. The irony in question was a tool to unsettle the present form of representation to allow one to reconfigure this form to make it fit what was represented. Marcus and Fischer borrowed this figure to ask about the cognitive validity of the anthropological writing which they experienced. Additionally, any period delineated by the mode of irony was filled with three other modes called romance, tragedy and comedy, respectively. Each of them was used to name a distinct yet circularly appearing way of representing the cultural world. At the same time, these three modes displayed so called big narratives of a paradigmatic nature. Marcus and Fischer give the examples of James Frazer, Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim in this respect. Contrary to this, the ironic narratives are experimental, fragmented, surreal and documentary. When referring to the previous ironic turn of the 1920’s and 1930s, one can notice that “the atmosphere was one of uncertainty about the nature of major trends of change and the ability of existing social theories to grasp it holistically”.¹¹ Anthropology was only an emerging unit at that time but gradually (the anthropologist) started to play an important role of the observer-analyst in the next decades. It was these decades when the self-other relation underwent a series of rotations as the social world became more and more global while being more and more dynamic.

As a part of their analysis, Marcus and Fischer proposed a remedy to the experienced crisis of representation. The reason was to locate or identify the author of such a representation as no longer being a transparent medium of this act or process. The author as a producer was required to realize the role played in the self-other relation. In this respect, Marcus and Fischer proposed two forms of the remedy called techniques of cultural critique. One was the epistemological critique, and the other was cross-cultural juxtaposition. They both served the purpose of the defamiliarization of what is well domesticated; were aimed at “disruption of common sense, doing the unexpected, placing familiar subjects in unfamiliar, or even shocking, contexts (...) to make the reader conscious of difference”.¹² This form of a culture shock, to use an expression borrowed from the communication studies, should therefore not only help an anthropologist, but also her reader, to orient themselves in a potentially changing cultural environment while contributing to preserving a high level of self-awareness. The epistemological critique amounted to undermining the very structure of one’s conceptual apparatus (in order) to trigger its cognitive power. For example, should one maintain tradition as an essential form of culture in the continuously changing world of events since one noticed the repetitive nature of tradition? Cross-cultural

¹⁰ G.E. Marcus, M.M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology...*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 10.

¹² Ibidem, p. 137.

juxtaposition served the clashing domestic forms of arranging the world with the investigated ones. For example, while attending a funeral, could one learn that the foreign audience's clapping hands is a sign of respect to the dead person, and that this is as equally noble as the domestic audience's silence? In so doing, Marcus and Fischer tried to show that anthropology was a discipline worthy of and requiring a self-reflecting turn.

Abu-Lughod

A couple of years later, new positions were taken with respect to the self-other relation. Let me discuss two of them. The first, Lila Abu-Lughod's one, was marked by criticism of the particular aspect of textual turn as symbolized by the volume *Writing Culture*.¹³ She remarked that the critique of the anthropological conduct excluded two important groups: feminists, and those whom she called "halfies" after Kirin Narayan, where the latter were described as "people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage".¹⁴ It is not only that these groups may be represented by the anthropologists. What is essential is that they testify to a derailment of the self-other relation. This condition makes both the feminists and the halfies question their positionality, audience and power. All these elements make the anthropologists thus classified "travel uneasily between speaking 'for' and speaking 'from'".¹⁵ According to Abu-Lughod, it is the concept of culture which makes such floating an inevitable fate. It is because of the coherence, timelessness, and discreteness that the culturally framed identities of both the selves and the others are trapped in (both) a static relation and in distancing ones. But one more element needs to be revealed here. It is especially discreteness that produces difference, and difference in turn carries hierarchy. Frankly speaking, on the grounds of logic one can plainly separate the relation of difference/opposition from the relation of subordination/hierarchy, so that no necessary condition makes the latter be implied by the former. However, Abu-Lughod appealed to evidence of the anthropological writing to show that these two relations were often closely linked. At the same time, she was aware that when fighting the hierarchy-difference connection, one – where one is often a feminist – in fact maintained its strength through distancing oneself from the opponent in whatever terms, including the cultural ones.

To avoid the difference relation being a hierarchically inclined one Abu-Lughod proposed what she called the modes or strategies of writing against culture, where the phrase "writing against culture" was a clear reference to the title of the volume

¹³ J. Clifford, G.E. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1986.

¹⁴ L. Abu-Lughod, *Writing Against Culture* [in:] R.G. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe 1991, p. 137.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

in question. The first – “Discourse and Practice” – combines two ways of disrupting the seemingly coherent and homogenous cultural representations. It is, then, Pierre Bourdieu who helps how to find and arrange “contradiction, misunderstanding, and misrecognition”¹⁶ in the anthropological discourses. It is also Michel Foucault’s “discursive formations, apparatuses, and technologies”¹⁷ that undermine various distinctions and therefore make the apparently hierarchical cultural picture collapse. The second strategy called “Connections” is aimed at identifying an anthropologist as an element of numerous and overlapping relations found and formulated in the field. It is no longer the anthropologist and the community as such; they both are no longer the separate and unchangeable, and undividable units. What emerges are historical, social and political fields of fluctuating interconnections in which the study proceeds. Finally, the third mode – “Ethnographies of the Particular” – is proposed. In this respect Abu-Lughod directly referred to Geertz,¹⁸ and Marcus and Fischer,¹⁹ when she appealed to the anthropological writing and the anthropological representation, respectively. Firstly, she objected to the generalizations so dominant in anthropological texts. She refused then to recognize groups – discrete and timeless items proved to be only apparently real. Secondly, Abu-Lughod invoked “women’s tradition”,²⁰ in which a closer and more intimate picturing of the other, yet deprived of “scientific” jargon, takes place.

To make such a move successful, the other should be found on a possibly individual level of interaction, and the mode of portraying this figure would require possibly direct contact and a story-telling registration. Abu-Lughod’s focus on the particular – her most recommended strategy – was aimed at highlighting similarities among human everyday experiences. It is not that she denied differences. In fact, she could not afford to do it, for one can notice that it was ignoring definite groups – feminists and halfies – which made her take the floor. She rather tried to confront or negotiate the abstract entities with the concrete actions performed by those who were “victimized” in anthropological texts. Like in the case of the first strategy, the focus on the particular should keep an anthropologist (being an ethnographer at the same time) “fixed on flux and contradiction”,²¹ and to do this by avoiding an illusionary basis, i.e. coherent and unchangeable foundations of one’s experience. Moreover, it should cause anthropologists to be perceived not “as robots programmed with ‘cultural’ rules, but as people going through life agonizing over decisions, making mistakes, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragedies and personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of happiness”.²² In this respect she appealed to what she called “tac-

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 147.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ C. Geertz, *Thick Description...*, op. cit.

¹⁹ G.E. Marcus, M.M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology...*, op. cit.

²⁰ L. Abu-Lughod L., *Writing...*, op. cit., p. 153.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 158.

²² Ibidem.

tical humanism” to pay attention to identifying social and political inequalities, and maintaining the significance of not only particular but also underprivileged individuals’ existences. And it is “the unprofessional and devaluated women ethnographies”²³ which were the source of inspiration for Abu-Lughod to open a new dimension of anthropological practice. I therefore take the particular as an object of a representation which emerges as the representation plunges into crisis. It is the second position on the self-other relation which should be addressed now.

Limón

It was José E. Limón who took a different position on the self-other relation while calling himself a native anthropologist. He therefore approached the relation in question from the other side. A part of his project was to present the object of analysis as experienced from “inside”. Limón being a member of a native community called *mexicanos* took up a position as an ethnographer who had to cope with the problem of representation and ethnicity. The latter is approached uniquely, my guess is, because the constituent characteristics of this ethnic group is of an economic nature. *Mexicanos* are “the working-class Mexican-Americans”.²⁴ What is intriguing is that they are Native and Hispanic at the same time, since they had already inhabited Texas before the U.S. Army conquered it in the middle of the 19th century (while speaking Spanish). In the new political circumstances also their economic status has been radically decreased, and therefore it is essential to notice this dimension of their ethnic identity. The problem of representation is raised as a reaction to the textual turn mentioned above. It is linked with the role the ethnographer plays, and Limón’s position is quite original here. He introduced the figure of the precursory ethnographer on whose work a younger professional may reflect. The task is difficult since one realizes that the precursory ethnographer can be both the U.S. Army officer, John Gregory Bourke, and another *mexicano*, Américo Paredes. And even if Limón focused on the latter as his mentor, he felt huge anxiety as he had to confront his object of study with his mentor’s. For Paredes investigated the heroic world of local people who, among others, resisted the U.S. domination with dignity, where balladry called the *corrido* was a “key symbol of this period’s culture”.²⁵

This historical representation of the events of the beginning of the 20th century which was “composed”, to use Christopher Kelty’s term,²⁶ in the 1950s, needed to be

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ J.E. Limón, *Representation, Ethnicity, and the Precursory Ethnography: Notes of a Native Anthropologist* [in:] R.G. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe 1991, p. 115.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 117.

²⁶ C. Kelty et al., *Collaboration, Coordination, and Composition: Fieldwork after the Internet* [in:] J.D. Faubion, G.E. Marcus (eds.), *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be: Learning Anthropology’s Method in a Time of Transition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca–London 2009, pp. 184–206.

confronted with what Limón experienced in the 1960's and 1970's. For what he faced was the unheroic world of degradation and violence, where the key symbol was polka dancing – a WASP cultural unit adopted by the socially dominated *mexicanos*. The whole trouble was that the picture of the unheroic was framed by stereotypes, which in turn were a product of the dominant representation. The reaction to this trouble was a self-reflective turn to reorient this representation. In this respect, Limón used the modern – postmodern relation as a key frame of analysis. The two terms “modern” and “postmodern” are quite vague and variously defined. For example, they may mean either epochs or attitudes. Limón himself is not clear here as he also uses the pair of terms “modernism” – “postmodernism” and “modernity” – “postmodernity” to name the same thing. Let me then propose to take both terms to refer to a human and/or social condition which cyclically happens. (I am using the term “condition” here to respect James Clifford, to whom Limón refers.) It would follow then that the modern condition means the human/social body being ordered and integrated, which also shows continuity with the past, while the postmodern condition amounts to the human/social body's disordered and disintegrated form, which shows discontinuity with the past too. (In both cases one may refer to the cognitive realm or the affective realm, or to both realms.) The dominant representation under attack would suggest the postmodern condition of the *mexicano* ethnic group of the 1960s and 1970s. With respect to polka dancing, Limón identifies the “totalizing choreographer” being a “dominating power”.²⁷ It is both the dance band and the human body itself where the latter is composed of a further three elements: “working-class labor, alcohol, and sexual desire”.²⁸ These elements in turn produce a “desire: to take the race and class war within itself, perniciously transform it into ‘manhood’, and sometimes inflict it upon other men (...)”.²⁹

Yet Limón notices a new movement. Do not forget that the native anthropologist is interested not just in (polka) music but dance. He pays his attention to a particular performance shared by many couples on the floor of the dance hall. What he then observes is that these couples become their own choreographers although this takes place for a moment; this artful performance “makes the couple look (...) as if they were one”.³⁰ They take, thus, control over their dancing against the postmodern condition of being politically dominated. It is because it is the dance itself as a piece of art which reminds us of the *corrido* performed before. And although the former is suited for a different occasion than the latter (as the dancing differs from the singing), it critically continues the tradition of artistic performance. In this way the couples prove to express a modern condition. This condition is meant, among other things, to consciously and critically link the present with the past, so that the present itself is not fragmented and therefore opposes being subject to degradation. “I see the dancing as

²⁷ J.E. Limón, *Representation...*, op. cit., p. 132.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 133.

³⁰ Ibidem.

a modernist performance, keyed as it is on the persistence of a historical tradition yet adapted to the present, rather than as a wholly emergent contemporary phenomenon in the manner of the postmodern”.³¹ Limon’s move makes me think of the relation between the modern and the postmodern as a useful key to analyse the open-ended nature of representation. It is like a line with its two extremes, which measures the social condition of being either organized or disorganized. The organized – disorganized relation would then relay on an assumption that the social actors are either critically/self-consciously oriented or not. But there is no sharp division between these two states. Instead, there is a number of intermediate states between these two. When Limón writes about one’s being in a state of “rediscovery of a relevant past”,³² he seems to support this point even if does not do it explicitly. This state of affairs is in Limón’s representation taken in the processual form; it allows us to notice the way of organizing or disorganizing, or moving between the two extremes called the modern and the postmodern, respectively.

Rabinow, Stavrianakis, and Faubion

In the next decade a different yet not opposite meaning was attached to the word “modernity”. Paul Rabinow, who substantially contributed to the textual turn of the 1980s, addressed the problem of the modern as a part of the project of developing his anthropology of the contemporary. The American anthropologist critically views the commonly understood modernity as a devotion to what is new, as a period or movement. What was supposed by such a modernist position was a holistic and/or homogenous nature of what is new. On the contrary, Rabinow understands the modern as a part of the compound where the new is accompanied by the old, and where this compound is an emergent and not repetitive unit. There is no evidence to prove the existence of the coherent entities, or that the unique configurations replace the existing ones. It is, then, the contemporary that encompasses the hybrids in their emerging and vanishing dynamics. According to Rabinow, “The contemporary is a moving ratio of modernity, moving through the recent past and near future in a (nonlinear) space that gauges modernity as an ethos already becoming historical”.³³ Modernity being measured by the contemporary is in continuous movement as paired with tradition, where this movement makes it (become) a temporal and changeable unit. It reminds us of Limón’s figure in a sense that Rabinow – while referring, among other things, to Michel Foucault – asks: “what difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?”.³⁴ It is not so important that he takes modernity as an ethos rather than

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem, p. 130.

³³ P. Rabinow, *Marking Time: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary*, Princeton University Press, Princeton–Oxford 2008.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 13.

a condition, but what he aims at is that the difference which presupposes the present reconfiguration of the past formation requires that the modern refers to its counterpart – the traditional; it does not represent the relation between today and yesterday alone.

The main object of Rabinow's anthropology is a figure called *anthropos*. It is not only a complex unit which comprises *bios*, *logos*, and *ethos*, but also possibly other elements like *pathos*, where these elements change while changing one another. *Anthropos* is viewed as involved in a series of relations with "the diverse, and at times inconsistent, branches of knowledge available during a period of time (...)"³⁵ It is also important to identify "the power relations" which model the claims of these branches. Rabinow names the contemporary a site where "older and newer elements are given form and worked together",³⁶ but the definition presented above suggests something more is at place here. I propose, then, to take the contemporary as both the attitude and the relation. First, since it qualifies for the frame of the pairing of modernity and tradition, where these two are a sort of ethos, it is quite plausible to take this frame as a compound ethos too. This proposal may be reinforced by later remarks made by Rabinow and his student and colleague, Anthony Stavrianakis, on Max Weber's demands of the day. They both discuss two forms of anthropological insight while introducing two characters: demon and daemon, respectively.³⁷ Although these characters are in a state of a clash, which not necessarily corresponds to the pairing of tradition and modernity shown above, this state is of a potentially innovative and creative nature. This is what the day which has gone, continues to be, and is to come, always demands. Second, being a moving ratio, the contemporary becomes a relation linking particular arguments: modernity and tradition, respectively. This relation is certainly presented within the dimension of time (and not only space), but nonetheless allows of the formal, i.e. logical association.

However, the contemporary has also a particular derivate. What I mean is the derivate of a noun in the form of an adjective. It is James Faubion who needs to be introduced here. This American social and cultural anthropologist was asked by Rabinow and Stavrianakis to pair the present and the contemporary to allow them to investigate a series of hybrid items represented by "*anthropos* as figure and an assemblage".³⁸ The point was that the pair of opposition between the present and the contemporary did not allow one to follow the processual nature "of the moving ratio". Faubion introduced next a third element – the actual – to make this nature visible. Any dyad implies an opposition of its elements, where these elements do not necessarily change in time; the difference is spatial. Therefore, no process is detectable. On the other hand, any triad makes one notice change, be it evolution or metamorphosis, since switching from phase one to phase two does not necessarily amount to switch-

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 4.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 3.

³⁷ P. Rabinow, A. Stavrianakis, *Demands of the Day: On the Logic of Anthropological Inquiry*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London 2013.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 11.

ing from phase two to phase three. In other words, phase one does not correspond to phase three. Faubion, Rabinow and Stavrianakis took the present as a preliminary state of the participant-observation (experience) which might mean an obvious and unproblematic state of affairs. However, since this state would break down or become problematic, the actual would replace the present. Note that Rabinow's and Stavrianakis's project is not Hegelian, "since the actual is not already present in and unfolding from that which is potential in the present".³⁹ In fact, the actual "entails conceptual clarification",⁴⁰ which requires at least an inductive mode of investigation. But what is more is that the actual may be replaced by the contemporary when the theoretical model followed by the clarification in question collapses. The actual then requires some curation, where the necessary action is invoked by a slogan "You have no right to despise the actual".⁴¹ (The slogan being of a performative nature is a repetition of Foucault's slogan "You have no right to despise the present", where the present was Foucault's object of analysis.) This curation represented by the contemporary takes the form of a particular mood, some sort of ethos, where one reorients towards the actual and therefore opens up to the near future.

Self-awareness

The positions described above allow me to point to a couple of characteristics which speak for the perspective under discussion. It is not, however, that these characteristics are exclusively typical of this perspective. Yet as taken together they define what it means to be anthropological (or ethnological) – for (one must) bear in mind that I am not speaking here about a profession but an orientation in face of a potential challenge. The first characteristic to mention, then, is self-awareness. It is closely associated with one's being self-critical or just critical, although I think that the former is less laden with controversy than the latter. Anyway, being self-aware means being potentially self-critical. It is evidenced, for example, by the crisis of representation which has definitely marked the cognitive condition of anthropology. Let me plunge into this problem when referring to one of the central terms of the anthropological vocabulary, that is "culture". Over fourteen decades between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 21st century, this term played a central role in the anthropological discourse. As defined by Edward Tylor,⁴² it may have been used as a transparent and taken for granted filter to allow one to put the chaotic field material into order. Yet through the next decades it was not only continuously reshaped but finally rejected as a Weberian ideal type of no further use. As pointed out by Marcus

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 11.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 107.

⁴² E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture. Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, vol. 1, John Murray – G.P. Putnam's Sons, London–New York 1920.

and Faubion it was designed for an already gone paradigm grounded in the idea of holism, as confronted with a new paradigm which presupposes a hybrid nature of the object under investigation.⁴³ It is not only important to note that anthropology, as many other fields, undergoes such paradigmatic changes. What is also striking is that at least some anthropologists have become aware that the representation (vide the concept of culture) is in crisis, and this crisis requires a remedy.

There is, however, the other side of the coin here. It is not that the crisis in question is a reaction to what takes place, say, outside the anthropological discourse. Let me recall the position Clifford took toward modernity which was associated with the “condition of rootlessness and mobility”⁴⁴ while being a result of a “feeling of lost authenticity”.⁴⁵ Note that it was Limón who addressed this position while attributing a different meaning to the term “modernity” and introducing the term “postmodernity”, which Clifford did not use in reference to his words quoted by the native anthropologist. This proves a strong fluctuation of the humanistic vocabularies, which by no means, however, evidences its weakness as compared with the scientific vocabularies. When associating the modern turn with the 1920s as evidenced by an experimental poem written by William Carlos Williams, and beginning with a phrase “The pure products of America go crazy...”,⁴⁶ Clifford pointed to a transition period being an element of circular movement (as) described by Marcus and Fischer.⁴⁷ The poet pointed to the feeling of missing the old but pure and the whole and unchangeable. Contrary to this, Clifford invited us to admire the new, which was hybrid and changeable, where the most suitable term is “creole”. It is no surprise then that two decades later Marcus, Rabinow, Faubion, and Tobias Rhees acknowledged the hybrid as the proper characteristic of the contemporary realm. Of course, one has to admit that the holistic nature of the concept of culture and the relative concepts like race, nation or ethnicity should be revisited and analysed, that is, addressed by a self-aware investigator like Abu-Lughod. However, this does not mean that such concepts associated with the relevant terms are simply Aristotelian products of the external and independent reality. In this respect, the condition of rootlessness and mobility (quoted above) are not typical of the transition marked by the 1920s in the USA but are typical of any transition marked by other dates in other sites. It is, at least partially, the anthropological discourse which frames the reality in question, and it is an anthropologist who tailors such a frame in a potentially self-aware manner.

⁴³ P. Rabinow et al., *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*, Duke University Press, Durham–London 2008.

⁴⁴ J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1988, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 1.

⁴⁷ G.E. Marcus, M.M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology...*, op. cit., pp. 7–16.

Complexity

On the one hand, Clifford identified an important factor of doing research, that is, the necessity of identifying the changing condition of the object under investigation. On the other hand, it is Limón who realized that such identification was a two way mechanism. An anthropologist is not only a source of knowledge about what is under cognitive construction. This anthropologist is at the same time a product of this knowledge. Such a feedback is closely associated with the crisis of representation just discussed. Limón, my hunch is, may contribute to the remedy of this crisis when launching the modern – postmodern model. When accepting both the modern and the postmodern in terms of condition, I interpret them as the extremes of a chain of degrees of how an object of investigation is represented. Let me approach this problem in the following way. When discussing Geertz’s idea of the thick description, I suggested that this “description is gradable”.⁴⁸ This meant, among other things, that it may be more or less thick, to show that an investigator has a possible flexible tool of analysis. I found a similar strategy in Deepa Reddy’s reflections on the predicaments of ethnography in collaboration, although she used a pair of the thin and the thick descriptions as the extremes.⁴⁹ I think Limón’s model can be understood in a similar way. The only difference is that it serves a different end, that is, allows one to picture the more or less united or integrated nature of the object of investigation. I use the expression “more or less” to highlight the processual and dynamic character of representation. Therefore I do not mean to take this model in terms of an alternative. When represented, the object of investigation can be attributed the capacity of not only being more or less fragmented but also of changing the degree of such fragmentation. In such a way the representation may be viewed as one of motion, where this object fluctuates due to the circumstances this object subjugates.

However, the fluctuation or change is possible to represent when introducing another model which implies the dimension of time, and not only the dimension of space as the previous model does. I would then like to appeal to Faubion’s triad, which was adopted by Rabinow and Stavrianakis. This triad is not of an evolutionary fashion, and yet allows of catching an ordered way in which an anthropological inquiry proceeds. What is essential here is that this model is open to unpredictable and contingent problems appearing, so that it unfolds as the anthropologist faces newer and newer challenges producing unexpected effects. When starting with the present, one may presuppose an unproblematic circumstance in which the object of investigation is not yet identified. It is only some cognitive disorder or crack that forces the anthropologist to identify this object. This amounts to making it a derivate of a chosen conceptual system, which requires taking it in metalinguistic terms; it

⁴⁸ A. Zaporowski, *Thick...*, op. cit., p. 143.

⁴⁹ D.S. Reddy, *Caught! The Predicaments of Ethnography in Collaboration [in:] Fieldwork...*, op. cit., pp. 108–110.

becomes the actual. Such a reduction to an abstract structure turns out to be only an initial yet necessary step, which is then followed by a possible adjustment (or a series of adjustments), since no conceptual system allows of a proper identification of an object notoriously fluctuating. It is the contemporary, which opens the horizon, where such an adjustment takes place. The model in question allows the anthropologists to conduct their research continuously and consciously at the same time. What is more is that they can merge this model with Limón's dyad to show the modern – postmodern balance of the object as it changes from the present to the actual to the contemporary as time flows. For example, the relatively modern state of some object may be replaced by a slightly more postmodern state of this object while switching from its present to its actual form. A deliberate analysis associated with a researcher's change of mood may then allow this researcher to identify a characteristic of the object to attribute it a different state than before. And such a procedure can be then continued. This merging of two models should form an emergent, new model. Both Limón's dyad and Faubion's triad are complex and serve a separate identification of the field under investigation. As merged, they produce not only a more complex system; they also allow the researcher to overlap previously separate modes of identification and therefore to have a more precise control of the field.

(Wo)man

Let me now present the object of anthropological investigation. I mean, among others, the particular. It is (wo)man who is a relational creature in two senses. First, this creature is part of the physical world in general, and of human communities in particular. Since I understand this world in terms of events, I take (wo)man to be involved in a series of events, to have effects on (wo)man and be caused by (wo)man. A particular instance of (such) an event is action. Let me distinguish what is called a physical action. (Wo)man is capable of performing such an action as exemplified by, say, an utterance and gesture, that is, a verbal and non-verbal action, respectively. Therefore (wo)man is not only involved in a series of events of the physical world as such, but also enters into a series of interactions with other (wo)men where these interactions are often a foundation of communities of a less or more temporal nature. Second, (wo)man does not perform a singular action; (wo)man's actions form a bunch (of such actions) in a sense that one action may accompany another action where the former may address (wo)man's counterpart's action while the latter may address an event of the world which occurs outside the social order. In this respect, such a bunch is ordered yet diverse. When asked what makes this bunch ordered and diverse at the same time I would answer that it is culture. I am aware, however, that some anthropologists, including Abu-Lughod, Faubion, Marcus and Rabinow, wish to do away with culture although they keep the cultural.⁵⁰ Still, even if culture is to

⁵⁰ P. Rabinow et al., *Designs...*, op. cit., pp. 106–110.

be erased from the anthropological vocabulary, which I do not recommend, it is, among other things, Rabinow's *ethos* (or ratio between *ethos* and *logos*) that reminds us of what conditions the human actions called intentional or symbolic. Therefore all I want to claim in this respect is that (wo)man's non-reflexive actions and what conditions them form a relational system.

Such a two dimensional creature, that is, a creature who is relational in these two senses, simultaneously generates and undergoes changes. It is a world of events which permanently challenges (wo)man to orient, which is represented as (wo)man moving between the two extremes of the modern and the postmodern. On the one hand, being under the modern condition means performing a bunch of ordered and foreseeable actions. Such a performance evidences (wo)man's being organized. However, the unpredictable nature of the world of events, including other (wo)men's purposeful actions, may and often does turn the modern condition into a postmodern condition. This means that (wo)man needs to reorient. There is a necessity to dismantle the previous (wo)man's, among others, cognitive organization to assemble a new organization to allow such a (wo)man to cope with the experienced challenge. This in turn it is possible to notice due to the triad of the present, the actual and the contemporary, where (wo)man is described as a moving and changing agent. At the same time, however, both the dyad and the triad discussed are an evidence of how an anthropologist acts. For it is this anthropologist who enters into a series of interactions with the investigated (wo)man. These interactions not only allow the anthropologist to represent (wo)man. They also make the anthropologist generate and undergo changes. In this respect (s)he also moves between the two extremes of the modern and the postmodern, and (s)he does this while passing from the present to the actual to the contemporary. Self-awareness and complexity become, then, the anthropologist's tools of analysis, where this analysis becomes a two way mechanism. It is this mechanism which allows the anthropologist to look at himself/herself through the representation of his/her object of investigation.

Conclusion

The anthropologist differs from both the scientist and the novelist while sharing some resemblances with both of them, and possibly with other actors. On the one hand, the anthropological self-awareness and complexity are not within the range of the scientific laws, and it is, among others, Richard Rorty who shows this difference. However, Rorty also proves that there are various forms of rationality.⁵¹ It is not only, then, the anthropologist's very capability to identify (wo)man's condition of being between the extremes discussed and to intellectually reduce the indifferent present to the meaningful actual that makes the anthropologist a critical thinker. It is also his/

⁵¹ R. Rorty, *Science as Solidarity* [in:] J.S. Nelson, A. Megill, D.N. McCloskey (eds.), *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1987, pp. 38–52.

her art of agreeing with another (wo)man or interacting with another (wo)man to turn the actual into the contemporary. On the other hand, the anthropologist need not compare with the novelist who may be a model of how to take the aesthetic perspective defined by Geertz. I do not simply mean the art of writing or composing. Of, course, representation and its important element – the particular – needs to be composed creatively. However, the anthropologist’s meditation over what is represented is an important component but only one of many of a complexity of skills to keep the represented in order. Since the anthropologist as an agent is a part of the world of events, (s)he should notice the condition of being a side in a series of human interactions. In this respect, while taking the anthropological perspective one may face a bunch of possible actions which amount not only to a reaction but also an initiation of a chain of events, so that one simultaneously models and is modelled by the other side(s) of these interaction(s). Moreover, this suggests that one inevitably enters the realm of movement – no matter if purposeful or not – which can no longer be escaped and requires continuous attention.

Bibliography

- Abu-Lughod L., *Writing Against Culture* [in:] R.G. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe 1991.
- Clifford J., Marcus G.E. (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1986.
- Clifford J., *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1988.
- Geertz C., *Religion as a Cultural System* [in:] C. Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York 1973.
- Geertz C., *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* [in:] C. Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York 1973.
- Geertz C., *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1988.
- Kelty C. et al., *Collaboration, Coordination, and Composition: Fieldwork after the Internet* [in:] J.D. Faubion, G.E. Marcus (eds.), *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be: Learning Anthropology’s Method in a Time of Transition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca–London 2009.
- Kwon H., *Perspectivism in Social Anthropology*, “NatureCulture” 2012, no. 01.
- Limón J.E., *Representation, Ethnicity, and the Precursory Ethnography: Notes of a Native Anthropologist* [in:] R.G. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe 1991.
- Marcus G.E., Fischer M.M.J., *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London 1986.
- Rabinow P. et al., *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*, Duke University Press, Durham–London 2008.

- Rabinow P., *Marking Time: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary*, Princeton University Press, Princeton–Oxford 2008.
- Rabinow P., Stavrianakis A., *Demands of the Day: On the Logic of Anthropological Inquiry*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London 2013.
- Reddy D.S., *Caught! The Predicaments of Ethnography in Collaboration* [in:] J.D. Faubion, G.E. Marcus (eds.), *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be: Learning Anthropology's Method in a Time of Transition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca–London 2009.
- Rorty R., *Science as Solidarity* [in:] J.S. Nelson, A. Megill, D.N. McCloskey (eds.), *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1987.
- Tylor E.B., *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, vol. 1, John Murray – G.P. Putnam's Sons, London–New York 1920.
- Zaporowski A., *Thick Description and the Crisis of Representation – an Anthropological Study*, trans. by R. Jantarski, “Studia Semiotyczne – English Supplement” 2015, vol. 27.