

21A.460  
April 12, 2005  
Geurts

Topic for discussion: How lived experience, phenomenological ways of being, can differ across cultures

- Is it true to say that those who are living in a particular social context have similarities in how lived experience is understood and represented?
- Bourdieu: social scientist who studied different ways of understanding the other
  - Pg. 127 – can apply Bourdieu’s model
  - Emphasized rational systematization and logical criticism
- What does one need to do to experience cross-culturally
- Concept of ‘trope’ introduced. How information is elicited (ie the type of question asked, phrasing) can influence what responses are obtained
  - For example, asking what senses are given privilege could be a primarily Western convention that could elicit incorrect information in a social context where the term ‘sense’ has a different social construction
- Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*: the idea can be used to analyze how people ‘sense’ their world
  - *Habitus* is not culture. A person is born into a certain place in society through whose conventions of reality he learns a particular way to see, how to perceive, what aspects of environment to attend to. The habitus of a person shapes identities, preferences, ways to move through space (example: the socialization of nuns in *The Nun’s Story*)
- Does culture exist as an ontological reality? Is there an innate reality to lived experience, or is everything an interpretation?
- Do people from different cultures/habitus experience things differently, or is it just conventions of language that are different? In other words, are the perceptions of reality truly different, or is there actually a universal experience that is obscured by different language?
- People’s perceptions are shaped by the social order they live in, but also shape, or reproduce, that social order
- What does it mean to be Anlo? If an Anlo person moved away for 20 years, would he/she still remain Anlo? What is it that retains identity? Is it geographic proximity to community, for example?
- There is no existence without a pre-existing structure, which is imprinted upon a person through the process of socialization
  - Likes and dislikes, usually considered markers of individuality, can be a patterned response to social conditions, not truly an ‘innate’ capacity
- What role does history play? Does culture an embodiment of history? How does identity endure?
- Ex. Puerto Rican identity: Puerto Ricans in New York not considered “from the Island” although they may consider themselves Puerto Rican

- In that sense, is Anlo identity based on residence in Anlo land? Or is there a deeper identity that has nothing to do with geographic location, but identity based on shared concepts, beliefs, cultural identity
  - For example, a Haitian boy who had been born and raised in the United States (never went to Haiti) was possessed. In this sense, what does it mean to be Haitian?
- Three categories of moral offenses in Anlo society: interpretations and perceptions about them reveal how individual is not considered to be an autonomous being outside of community and family. Person is inextricably linked to family.
  - Worst moral offenses punished by live burial
  - Second worst moral offenses (witchcraft, dirty money) are punished by having the family send a girl to serve at a shrine for the rest of her life.
  - How is witchcraft constructed in this context? How does divination link to notions of guilt and punishment?
- Geurts claims that it is impossible to separate cognitive, sensory, and fields of perceiving – they are all interconnected
  - Sensorium, or body of sensory knowledge and ways to perceive it, are cultivated in children through various practices that the children internalize and in turn reproduce
- Birthing practices? What is the purpose of birthing rituals?
  - Birth dirt: vernix caseosa. What is the cultural significance, and meaning behind this phenomenon? What is it caused by?
  - Birthing rituals highlight the emphasis placed on cleanliness as a moral activity. Maintaining good hygiene is seen as a way to establish good moral character, much like European explorers used hygiene practices to distinguish themselves as superior to African natives (Fabian)
  - Placenta is seen as a form of stool (Janzen)
- Notions of stigma:
  - There is the idea that the baby is not whole at birth, need to use ritual to completely include the baby in society
- What is the role of history in forming identity, social structures, ways of being? What is the role of using archetypal images to shape identity?
  - Migration story is a mythic story
- Conclusion: Physical motions are at the center of the way Anlo view themselves. Kinaesthetic considerations form a major part of sensorium that strongly influences their sense of identity, notion of moral community. Culture is lived and reproduced through socialization processes of children, and identity is actively created.

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