Introduction

This book promotes an eclectic, multifaceted anthropology in which multiple approaches are applied in pursuit of the limited insights that each can afford. I present summary discussions of various theoretical terms applicable to many social sciences. These are given as an alphabetical list as a means of considering an eclectic set of theoretical ideas that are helpful for the social sciences. I do not endorse any one of these ideas as supplying an exclusive path to enlightenment: I absolutely do not advocate any single position. As a devout nonconformist, I hope that the following sections provide material, ammunition and succour to those undertaking nuanced anthropological analysis (and their kin in related disciplines). This is not a manifesto for yet another 'turn'.

Mixing up or combining different ideas and approaches can produce results that, in their breadth and richness, are productive for anthropology and other social sciences, reflecting the endless complexities of real life. This is my response to the death of grand theory. I see our task as learning how to deal with that bereavement and how to resist the siren lures of those promising synoptic overviews.

My proposition, as a self-consciously synoptic overview, is that:

> all overviews are misleading and inadequate (and always will be)

and its corollary:

> do not try to develop one.

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Instead I think we should embrace an eclectic anthropology. This requires consideration of the task at hand followed by careful choice of the theories best suited to achieve that task. The ethnography, and the questions we ask about it, will inevitably be influenced by the theoretical stances adopted (as well as reciprocally influencing them). So it is productive to view the subject through a variety of different lenses, adopting one day a structuralist approach, the next day a Marxist one, another day a phenomenological, then perhaps a realist one, and finally trying out an ontological one. Such eclecticism accommodates and reflects what Nancy Cartwright calls a 'dappled world', which is described by rules that form 'a patchwork not a pyramid' (1999: 1). Invoking another metaphor, David Sutton, discussing Sahlins' theory of history as applied to cooking in Greece, makes the point that cookery can also be a useful metaphor for theory (2018: 99), so this book could be seen as a listing of the ingredients for an anthropological soup.

As a parenthesis, I am aware that placing so much emphasis on the ethnography takes me a long way from the free-for-all of old-style postmodernism. Although this book is about theory, at heart it is not theory-driven. The Coda presents a small incident I observed during fieldwork in Cameroon together with my reflections on it, as an example of what dappled ethnography might look like. It illustrates the sort of excursions on which ethnographic research can take us: meandering journeys, following where the data lead us, and sometimes involving unexpected and fruitful deviations (Just and Zeitlyn 2014). This approach contrasts starkly with the strictly predetermined routes of (now sometimes preregistered) hypothesis-driven data gathering.

My intention here is to explore a different sort of anthropology: one without a master- (or meta-) narrative. Imagining what anthropology would be like without a meta-narrative is a type of thought experiment. If we can remove the pin from the Gordian knot of Grand Theory, then we might conclude that we are better off without it. Such a move belongs to what Mi-

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chael Herzfeld called the 'militant middle ground' (1997: 165 ff). Several articles in the journal *Anthropological Theory* endorse this sort of approach, one that Bruce Knauft describes as putting 'anthropology in the middle' (2006) along with Herzfeld's own reconsideration of anthropological realism (2018), which also belongs in this middle ground.

Looking back at a previously dominant theoretical figure, I am both for and against Lévi-Strauss. For him, I would say that bricolage is all there is; against him, that he assumes that a social group has a relatively simple underlying structure. I am for the randomness, the continually extemporised re-creation that makes and remakes society anew but in ways that are recognisably influenced by and dependent on what went before (there is an echo of Darwinian logic in this phrasing). This is a form of constraint, but it is not a determining pattern. There is no architect. There is no single 'structuring structure', as Anthony Giddens put it. (As a parenthetical note on Giddens, which is worth making here: if *many* structuring structures exist, then the resulting picture is very different from that which a *single* structuring structure would produce, especially if the many structures potentially conflict with one another. I would be very happy with an account that allows for multiple structuring structures.) My quarrel is with those who think they have identified the one true course, the single most important thing about human society. I believe that no such thing exists and that to assert its existence is at best misleading and at worst seriously misrepresents the worlds we live in.

These worlds are replete with emergent properties that mislead: generations of theorists have inferred underlying structures on the basis of emergent, hence second-order, properties. My claim is that these inferences are often unwarranted: no underlying structure is necessary to explain the emergent properties. In his re-examination of Marcel Griaule's oeuvre, Andrew Apter makes a similar point: 'In this case, Griaule is succumb-

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ing to the synoptic illusion (Bourdieu 1977: 97–109), when practical systems of classification are abstracted into a fixed hierarchy of logical relations apart from their context-specific validity, and thus appear contradictory' (Apter 2005: 118).

Understanding Social Worlds: Metaphors for the Task

My recent work on photography leads me to use a visual metaphor first. An aural one is considered below.

The approach I am advocating evokes the early cubism of Braque or Picasso, rather than the single viewpoint of photography or perspective-based landscape painting. Marcel Griaule exemplifies this issue. Having served in the First World War as an aerial photographer, he later worked with the Dogon in Mali and fantasised about the 'perfect view' that aerial photography could provide of a society (1937: 469–74). (Echoes of this fantasy are found in the discussions and controversies surrounding Google Earth and Google Streetmaps.) The aerial photograph exemplifies or concretises the panopticon (designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1785), which Foucault describes as the embodiment of power, part of the process by which the power of the state becomes incorporated into an individual's body. There is a chain of connection from this sort of optical tyranny to the colonisation of the eyes, and the claim that seeing is possessing (see Wolf 1990).[1] To return to the cubist parallel, the facets of a cubist painting show different aspects of the object portrayed, which may not be simultaneously visible in reality (such as the forehead and the back of the head) but which conventionally we infer: when we are shown a face, we suppose the skull behind it. By combining elements from mutually exclusive perspectives, cubist painters made us aware of our unceasing and unconscious attempts to fill in the invisible armatures that hold together the little we see at any one moment. Cubism forces us to acknowledge this process of filling in the gaps: the (usually

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tacit) assumptions we must make in order to make sense of the world. As researchers, we should be conscious of background assumptions about how social worlds are made. Such presumptions might mislead, so caution must be taken. As researchers, it is essential that we consciously scrutinise and verify our background premises lest they cause us to misconstrue events.

The second metaphor for understanding social worlds is aural. On my account, the sound of life does not have a single underlying, unifying theme or motif. Instead, the noise produced is closer to a cacophony, with many tunes played simultaneously in many different keys and registers. To consider noise is also to invoke its opposite: silence. This recalls Philip Peek's paper on sound (1994), in which he considers, among other things, how power is connected to silence: power can be manifested by restricting communication between office holders and others (such as kings and their subjects). Rulers cannot be addressed by their subjects directly, nor will they deign to address those subjects. Rather, in both cases rulers use a third-party mouthpiece. As a consequence, no one can speak back to them, further embedding the power imbalance. Jean-Pierre Warnier explored this theme in his analysis of Mankon manifestations of power in Cameroon (2007). Peek also considers masquerades and sound. In many places, it is not the mask's shape or costume that is important but the noise it makes. He suggests that a form of synaesthesia can be applied to aid an analysis:

> If we shift from our usual visual models and terminology to auditory models and terminology will we find the same conclusions from cultural systems? Rather than seeing what we can hear, what if we try hearing what we can see? It may be that the auditory manifestation is more essential and direct than the visual representation. (Peek 1994: 489)

By listening attentively, concentrating now on some frequencies and then on others, we can begin to distinguish elements in

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what at first sounded like an undifferentiated cacophony. With care, we can identify patterns and shapes in the sound, if not exactly tunes.[2] We may begin to hear how the noises of one year resemble (echo) but do not exactly reproduce those of previous years. Each performance (not only of ritual but also of many mundane social events) is a re-creation: even without a script, the performers remember what they did last time; they may try to do it again 'better' or just 'differently', perhaps making small changes because some performers and their instruments have been replaced by other performers using different instruments. A range of changes occur, from small incremental shifts to radical reinterpretations, as with classic tunes in jazz, each riffing on a theme. These processes are the motors of change (and also reflect change; both are possible).

I suggest that there are positive consequences of thinking about social worlds as cubist creations or repeated sound performances. Critically, if we adopt a multifaceted perspective, change becomes not just unsurprising but inevitable. This overcomes the problems of stasis that beset so many grand narrative theories (Marxism notwithstanding). The resulting analysis is always a fine balance: on the point of collapse but never quite, or never completely, falling down. The consequent lack of certainty (or dogmatism) is healthy and humbling. It makes us better anthropologists and possibly even better humans.

Theoretical Sparsity or Exuberance?

Sometimes I rail against theoretical exuberance, especially reliance on neologism. Some authors seem to see the coining of a new term as the answer to many and different problems, as if they were following the injunction 'if in doubt, then neologise' (or they invent a new meaning for an existing term). A curmudgeonly response to such exuberance would be to impose a near

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absolute limit on the number of permissible theoretical terms: whenever a new one is added, an old one should be jettisoned in its favour. But the purpose of this book is different: here I want to explore a wider range of concepts applicable to social sciences than are usually considered in theoretical discussions, in order to encourage theoretical breadth and productive eclecticism.

Notes for a Hypertext

Since I list the concepts in this book alphabetically, it should perhaps have only 26 sections, but since I prefer not to be a prisoner of formalism, some letters have more than one entry, others have none, and the length of the entries varies. In the end, I decided that although the organisational principle might be helpful it would be counterproductive to impose an artificial pattern on the sections, and so I have ended up with 60.

My selection of entries for inclusion inevitably involved decisions to omit. By and large, I have avoided discussing the larger and more heavily worn topics, such as functionalism, postmodernism, deconstruction and ontologies. One of my goals has been to explore the extent to which other theoretical positions are fruitful. So, for example, I include bifocality as an alternative to the ontological turn. More invidious choices had to be made between alternatives: which was the better head word, and which should merely be a cross-reference? Should there be one entry or two? For example, was it right to include an entry for *ironic detachment* with only a cross-reference to *bad faith*; to keep separate entries for *exemplars* and *vignettes* and for *essentially contested concepts* and *wicked problems*?

In planning this book, the question I asked myself was how to write about anthropological theory without making any specific theoretical argument. In other words, is it possible to practise anthropology without arguing for a single specific approach? My attempt to answer these questions has taken the form of a

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series of mini-essays about an eclectic collection of theoretical concepts that, over many years of anthropological practice, I have found helpful (or at least perplexing and tantalising, offering the promise of helpfulness or the prospect of thinking differently). In a similar spirit, Mieke Bal (2002) discusses some 'travelling concepts' and how they can be used to stay close to material being analysed while connecting to wider theory (since concepts are always connected to theories).[3] All such discussion is to encourage readers to consider what Peter Sohlberg and Håkon Leiulfsrud call the 'heuristic potential of homeless concepts' (2017: 8). The results add up, *indirectly*, to an argument for a dappled anthropology: one that not only accepts but revels in the muddled inconsistencies in people's conduct of their messy lives. However, for all the mess, there are discernible patterns in the way that people live their lives: the actors understand what is going on, they see an event unfolding in ways that are recognisable as belonging to a certain type. I suggest that if the actors can gain such understandings then so too can anthropologists and other researchers.

Patterns can become visible through forms of network analysis. By mapping the patterns of cross-reference in this book, we can see the interrelations of its *Hesse net* (see entry on this below). The full network diagram can be downloaded from the publisher's website.[4] It shows constellations of closely related terms and the importance of a few terms that link the different parts of the diagram. Two connecting terms that stand out are *finitism* and *ostension* (near the top right and bottom left of the diagram): neither of these terms features strongly in anthropological discourse. Another linking term, found at the top left, is *exemplar*, which has an interestingly uneasy relationship to the concept appearing near the centre of the diagram, *vignette* (which is why there are two entries and not just one). It may be that the distance between *exemplar* and *vignette* in the diagram is evidence of the difference between them: they have different sets of connections that distinguish the two concepts.

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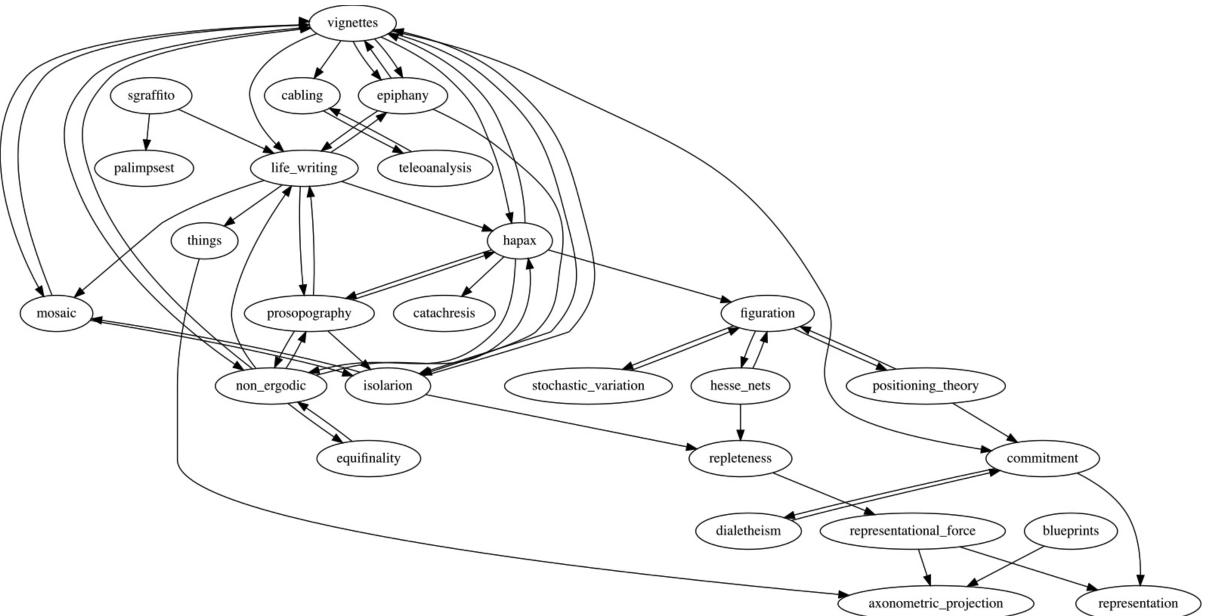

Figure 1. Central detail from the Hesse net or network diagram of cross-references between the concepts in this book. Image generated with Graphviz

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Figure 1 shows an extract from the centre of the full diagram. The terms clustered in this detail are to do with dealing with the unrepeatability of everyday life and its representation. Although they may be similar to one another, individuals have their idiosyncrasies, and researchers have to make sense of these, seeing how the unique individuals they are dealing with nonetheless have resemblances to others in their group that can be *represented* in ways that are yet *faithful*.

Finally, the Coda, describing an incident recorded in my fieldwork and my reflections on it, is an illustration of tessellated or mosaic-ed ethnography. Of course this one fragment of ethnography cannot use or invoke all the ideas described in this book, but it is written with them in mind (and sometimes in conscious revolt against them). In terms of research, the two important tests are whether the analyst has gained a justifiable understanding of events observed and whether they have successfully conveyed that understanding to others.

A note on bibliography. In principle it would have been possible to write a book (or several) about each topic, and indeed many have been written. Attempting to make this text as readable as possible, I have tried to keep the bibliographic load to a minimum and give a separate bibliography for each entry.

Notes

1. This also connects to the 'erotics' of and the elements of epistemophilia in anthropology; that discussion must await another day.
2. Tina Campt encourages us to listen to the hum of archives in just the same way (2017).
3. As Neumann and Nünning (2012: 4–5) point out, precedents for this were made by Edward Said and James Clifford.
4. Also available from the Oxford Data Archive at https://doi.org/10.5287/bodleian:Kz2VqjXz6.

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