S y l l a b u s

Theory in anthropology since the eighties [MA]

Module: MA-M01
Winter semester 2018/19
Thursday, 2 – 4 pm
Room: SH 1.109
Mirco Göpfert

Anthropology has often been applauded for its love of empirical detail; and it has just as often been criticized for its lack of theoretical efficiency or, in other words, its reluctance to engage with and contribute to broader social and cultural theory. This seminar is supposed to prove this criticism wrong, yet without disqualifying anthropology's empirical rigour. The not-so-arbitrary historical starting point for this seminar will be the 1980s: the period that followed (or was launched by) the symbolic or interpretive turn in anthropology.

After the first part, including the introductory session and a brief reminder of "what happened before", the second part of the seminar will cover broad and general reflections about what theory is and does (or should be and do), particularly in anthropology, and how it relates to practice and evidence. Then, in the third part, we discuss anthropology's recent contribution to social theory in terms of agency, community, and morality. The fourth part focuses on theoretical schools, styles and issues that have proven critical for anthropology since the 1980s. This concerns, for example, phenomenology, actor-network-theory and poststructuralist approaches; it concerns issues such as global dis/connections and ontological divides; and it concerns struggles about representation, feminism and militant engagement. That being said, the precise structure and content of part four is yet to be determined. We will collectively decide about what to take in and what to leave out in one of the first sessions of the seminar, depending on the participants' aims and interests.

At the end of this seminar all participants should be able to (a) give an anthropologically informed view on the nature of theory, (b) sketch the major theoretical debates in anthropology since the eighties, (c) critically articulate their own view of them, and (d) develop a critically informed theoretical position of their own.

Basic course requirements / *Studienleistung* (6 CP, not graded)

Attendance and Participation: Attendance means, first of all, that you need to be present in our weekly sessions. If you miss the session in which you are supposed to deliver a talk or another kind of input, because you had an accident, are ill, or a tree fell on your house, please do let me know as soon as possible (because I may have to reorganize the session). In any case, missing a session without a valid reason does not exempt you from reading the assigned material. If you miss more than two sessions, or if you do not hold your presentation (*Referat*), you cannot pass. Participation means that not only your bodily attendance, but your active involvement is required. A seminar without informed and cooperative participation is not a seminar worthwhile having. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable speaking out in our sessions, please do tell me. If you are physically present but haven't read the literature for the session, you are not fully participating, and this will be counted as an absence.

10-Min-Talk: All participants are expected to give a short talk of 8 to 10 minutes, ideally to a topic of your own choosing. I'll make a few suggestions for each session. Please send me the script of your presentation (yes, the written manuscript!) via e-mail at least two days before our session. But: Do not read out your presentation. Do not use a script while presenting. Talk freely. This means that you need to spend at least two days preparing only the delivery of your talk, your overall presentation and performance. I know, it is really difficult to deliver a clear message in talking, and even more so if it's about a theoretically complex issue. This is why you need to carefully draft the architecture of your talk; take your time constructing your story; choose precise words and clear sentences that people will understand after hearing them only once; choose wisely if and how you visualize the key points of your talk (there is hardly anything worse than poor power point presentations). Take a look at Chris Anderson's book "TED Talks: The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking" (2016). I'm not saying that TED talks should be the new standard for all our talks, let alone student presentations. But I think there is a lot to learn from them, anyhow.

Module exam / *Modulprüfung* (3 CP, graded)

As an exam for the MA-Module 1 (*Kultur- und Gesellschaftstheorien*) you have to write a final essay (15-17 pages, 36.000-40.800 signs including spaces but excluding notes and references), ideally building upon the ideas presented in your talk. You can write in English or German.

Contact me by mid-January 2019 at the latest (!) so that we can pin down the theme of your essay. However, I strongly advise that you think about this as quickly as possible.

Please take notice of the department's guidelines concerning form and formatting of your essays: https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/45426646/Broschuere-Wissenschaftliches-Arbeiten.pdf

Important deadlines

- Registration for examination by Friday, 15 February 2019 via QIS/LSF
- Withdrawal from the exam by Friday, 22 March 2019 via QIS/LSF
- Submission of the final essay (Hausarbeit) by Friday, 29 March 2019
- Repetition: Submission by Friday, 7 June 2019

PART ONE: THE BASICS

1) Introduction (18/10/2018)

The first session is about the basic basics. We talk about what this seminar is about, why it is about these things, and how we are going to approach them. Also, we talk about the basic requirements for your participation and examination.

2) What happened before… (25/10/2018)

This second session is supposed to bring us all "up to speed", so to say. Matei Candea will help us remind ourselves of the late 19th- and early 20th-century schools and styles of anthropology; Sherry Ortner in her article gives a matchless summary of, well, "Theory in anthropology since the sixties". All of this is supposed to help us historically contextualize what has happened afterwards.

Readings

Candea, Matei (2018): "Severed roots. Evolutionism, diffusionism and (structural-)functionalism". In: Candea, M. (ed.): *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 18–59.

Ortner, Sherry B. (1984): "Theory in anthropology since the sixties". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1): 126–166.

Further reading

Appadurai, Arjun (1986): "Theory in anthropology. Center and periphery". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28 (02): 356–361.

PART TWO: WHAT IS THEORY IN ANTHROPOLOGY?

Now that we are all up to speed (regarding the pre-1980 history of theory in anthropology), we can turn to the heart of the matter: theory, anthropological theory and evidence.

3) Theory (01/11/2018)

This is a course about theory. Well, but what is "theory" after all? According to Dominic Boyer and Charles Taylor it is – perhaps above all else – something people *do*.

Readings

Boyer, Dominic C. (2001): "Foucault in the bush. The social life of post-structuralist theory in east Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg". *Ethnos* 66 (2): 207–236.

Taylor, Charles (1985): *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical papers 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Chapter: Social theory as practice, pp. 91-115]

10-Min-Talk on "Critical Theory and Anthropology?"

4) Anthropological theory (08/11/2018)

If theory is something people do (that is, something people think with and thus bring to life so that it leaves its print on our lived world), then is there such a thing as "anthropological theory"? And if yes, what makes it anthropological? Might there even be such a thing as "ethnographic theory"? … "That's enough!!", is probably what Tim Ingold would reply.

Readings

Hastrup, Kirsten (2016): "The dynamics of anthropological theory". *Cultural Dynamics* 9 (3): 351–371.
Knauft, Bruce M. (2016): "Anthropology in the middle". *Anthropological Theory* 6 (4): 407–430.

10-Min-Talk on: "Ethnographic Theory?"

5) Evidence in anthropology (15/11/2018)

If one says "theory", then one must also say "evidence", right? Evidence is commonly supposed to be held against theories to either support or refute them. It is something that is "out there" and against which all theory must be tested. Now, given all that we've said about anthropological theory in our previous session, what do we make of this?

Readings

Engelke, Matthew (2008): "The objects of evidence". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14: 1-21.
Hastrup, Kirsten (2016): "Getting it right. Knowledge and evidence in anthropology". *Anthropological Theory* 4 (4): 455–472.

10-Min-Talk on "Validity in Anthropology?"

PART THREE: ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIAL THEORY

Anthropology has long been seen as an empirical discipline that is at best merely applying (or testing) the insights from social theory. In this part of the seminar we focus on the opposite, namely how anthropology has significantly contributed to and entered into dialogue with (contemporary) social theory in three key domains: agency and subjectivity community, and ethics.

6) Agency and subjectivity (22/11/2018)

In very rough terms, the concept of agency connects what we do with what we want, our practice with our will. Admittedly, not everything we do is the manifestation (nor the repression) of our will. Agency is thus intimately related with the notions of power and subjectivity. Sherry Ortner's thinking is a prime example of how anthropology and social theory interconnect.

Readings

Ortner, Sherry B. (2006): *Anthropology and Social Theory. Culture, power, and the acting subject* (A John Hope Franklin Center Book). Durham, London: Duke University Press. [particularly:

Introduction: Updating practice theory, pp. 1-18; Chapter 6: Power and projects: Reflections on agency, 129-153]

10-Min-Talk on "Subject, Individual or Person?"

7) Community (29/11/2018)

Society is usually understood not as a random set of disconnected individuals but as a formation of individual persons that are somehow held together through time, often through a sense of belonging. Any number of (more than two) individuals who share a vague sense of being connected with one another (however vague this sense may be!) can be called a "community" – be it a pair of hikers, a group of churchgoers or a whole nation. Anthropology has a lot to say about how such communities come about.

Readings

Amit, Vered and Nigel Rapport (2002): *The Trouble with Community: Anthropological reflections on movement, identity and collectivity*. London: Pluto Press. [Chapter 3: The trouble with community, pp. 42-65]

Cohen, Anthony P. (2008[1985]): *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London: Routledge. [Introduction, pp. 11-38]

10-Min-Talk on "Imagined Communities?"

→ NO SESSION ON 6 December 2018!

8) Ethics (13/12/2018)

The communities we have talked about in the previous session often also share a set of norms all of its members tend to agree about: normative judgements on what kind of behaviour is desired and what isn't; what is good and what is bad. Anthropology has for a long time understood itself as a "moral science" but only recently has it explicitly picked up ethics and morality as an object of investigation. Didier Fassin and Michael Lambek are two important figures in that regard.

Readings

Fassin, Didier (2008): "Beyond good and evil? Questioning the anthropological discomfort with morals". *Anthropological Theory* 8 (4): 333–344.

Lambek, Michael (2010): "Introduction". In: Lambek, M. (ed.): *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, language, and action*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1–36.

Lambek, Michael (2010): "Towards an ethics of the act". In: Lambek, M. (ed.): *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, language, and action*. New York: Fordham University Press, 39–63.

10-Min-Talk on "Ethics in Anthropology?"

PART FOUR: SCHOOLS, STYLES, ISSUES

9) A bit of sitting and thinking (20/12/2018)

Until now we will have covered quite some theoretical ground regarding both key notions of theoretical practice and anthropology's contribution to social theory. In the final part of the course, we will move on to focussing on specific schools, styles and issues at the heart of contemporary debate in anthropology. Since the total number of our sessions is really small as compared to the number of schools, styles and issues relevant to "theory in anthropology since the eighties", I'd rather not impose a selection of topics but leave it up for discussion. In this session, I'd like us to take a moment to sit and think about what we have talked about so far and what we want to talk about in the remainder of the semester. The following is a mere list of suggestions in alphabetical order. We'll determine the exact schedule in this week's session.

The dates for us to fill are

- 17 January 2019
- 24 January 2019
- 31 January 2019
- 7 February 2019

X) Actor-Network Theory

Candea, Matei (2018): "No actor, no network, no theory. Bruno Latour's anthropology of the moderns". In: Candea, M. (ed.): *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 209–223.

Strathern, Marilyn (1996): "Cutting the network". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (3): 517–535.

10-Min-Talk on "ANThropology?"

X) Embodiment

Csordas, Thomas J. (1990): "Embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology". *Ethos* 18 (1): 5–47.

Jackson, Michael (1996): "Introduction: Phenomenology, radical empiricism, and anthropological critique". In: Jackson, M. (ed.): *Things as They Are: New directions in phenomenological anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1–50.

10-Min-Talk on "The Example of Paul Stoller?"

X) Feminist anthropology

Abu-Lughod, Lila (1990): "Can there be a feminist ethnography?". *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 5 (1): 7–27.

Di Leonardo, Micaela (1991): "Introduction: Gender, culture, and political economy. feminist anthropology in historical perspective". In: Di Leonardo, M. (ed.): *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist anthropology in the postmodern era*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1–48.

10-Min-Talk on "The Female Other?"

X) Global connections

Appadurai, A. (1990): "Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy". *Public Culture* 2 (2): 1–24.

Tsing, Anna L. (2005): *Friction: An ethnography of global connection*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

10-Min-Talk on "Adaptation, Appropriation or Translation?"

X) Militant anthropology

D'Andrade, Roy (1995): "Moral models in anthropology". *Current Anthropology* 36 (3): 399–408.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy (1995): "The primacy of the ethical. Propositions for a militant anthropology". *Current Anthropology* 36 (3): 409–440. [including comments]

10-Min-Talk on "Applied Anthropology?"

X) Ontological turn

de Castro, Eduardo Viveiros (2004): "Exchanging perspectives. The transformation of objects into subjects in Amerindian ontologies". *Common Knowledge* 10 (3): 463–484.

Graeber, David (2015): "Radical alterity is just another way of saying 'reality'". *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 1–41.

Holbraad, Martin (2009): "Ontography and alterity. defining anthropological truth". *Social Analysis* 53 (2): 80–93.

10-Min-Talk on "So What Now?"

X) Representation

Abu-Lughod, Lila (1991): "Writing against culture". In: Fox, R. G. (ed.): *Recapturing anthropology: Working in the present*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 137–162.

Clifford, James (1986): "Introduction. Partial truths". In: Clifford, J. and George E. Marcus (eds.): *Writing Culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography; a School of American Research advanced seminar*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1–26.

10-Min-Talk on "What Now?"

14) Conclusion (14/02/2019)

Now it's time for a few final thoughts (in retrospect and looking ahead).

Last reading
Ortner, Sherry B. (2016): "Dark anthropology and its others. Theory since the eighties". *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (1): 47–73.

ADDITIONAL INFO

Making sense of and really appropriating the material and issues at hand will depend on the compulsory reading and the short student presentations each week. The former will create a common ground of discussion for all participants; the latter will focus on specific problems and issues that go beyond the compulsory reading and introduce them into our discussion.

a. Required reading

A word on the reading load: I know there is a lot to read for this seminar. But I assure you, if you let go of your initial defensive reflexes, you'll enjoy reading most of it. Plus, I would like you to get used to something that will probably dominate most of your professional reading life: There is much you need to read and you have no time to do so. Try to get hold of texts by approaching them in a very economical way by asking a number of questions first: What kind of a text is this? (Is it an intro into an edited volume? An encyclopedia entry? A theoretical text? An empirical case study?) Who is the author? (Is she a hard-boiled ethnographer, a coldblooded theorist?) Who is she addressing? (Professional colleagues, an interdisciplinary audience or the wider public?) What does she want? (What is, in one sentence, the thing she tries to convince me of? Or what is it she tries argues against and wants me to leave behind?). And absolutely do write all of this down in a systematic way (e.g. in Citavi)!

b. Short presentations

Short presentations (or: 10-Min-Talks) will be given by students (individually or in groups) to introduce specific problems and backgrounds to the issues at hand into our discussion. **Short presentations must NOT consist of the mere description of the compulsory reading or a sequence of historical dates**. They should present a specific issue (or the essential contours thereof) in a brief and concise manner and open particular issues up to our seminar discussion. Questions for discussion should not be saved "for later" (after the presentation) but should play a major role in the presentation itself.

I very much welcome the use of visual media. However, visualisations must not be an end in their own right. At times the use of visual media is helpful but sometimes it is better to simply talk (without pictures in the background, etc.). A handout is not necessary.

Now: Enjoy!