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### The Cultural in Cultural Heritage

It is something of an irony that so little discussion has been devoted to the intellectual heritage of heritage studies, that a field of study devoted to the significance of roots should be perceived without roots itself. In the following I introduce the anthropological tradition as one foundation for productive cultural heritage research in the United States. In part, the concerns of heritage studies resonate so well with American anthropology because of the “four-field” strengths of housing archaeological and ethnographic researchers within the same field and departments, which in the Boasian tradition of anthropology in the United States has produced a rich legacy for work, combining archaeological and ethnographic approaches. Further, Boasian anthropology established the American anthropological tradition and its focus on “culture”—as distinct from British and French social anthropology—and therefore illuminates the “cultural” half of the term “cultural heritage.” While over the years the four fields of anthropology (sociocultural anthropology, archaeology, physical anthropology, and linguistics) have undergone increasing specialization and independence from one another, their institutional housing within the same department does support research and training across fields, and therefore the opportunity for creative “field work” at the intersections. Currently, cultural heritage is an important area of such integration, and anthropology students specializing in heritage are increasingly cross-trained in archaeological and ethnographic methods and theory, in a return to a kind of Boasian anthropology. This integration of the two fields creates a third space, neither solely sociocultural nor archaeological, but a holistic joining of the two. Moreover, this combination of ethnographic and archaeological concerns signals one identifiable American school of heritage studies—centered around ethnographic approaches to heritage—which I refer to in the following as “ethnoheritage.”

The ethnographic turn within heritage studies would be well served by looking to the American anthropological tradition, and the work of ethnoheritage coming out of this tradition. New research from the United States is addressing the “cultural” half of cultural heritage in ways capable of drawing out the public, persuasive, and “bottom-up” dimensions of cultural heritage. Ethnoheritage is particularly well-suited to address the calls within heritage studies for “bottom-up” research, which foregrounds the experiential and lived nature of cultural heritage. Moreover, cultural heritage is approached as a public phenomenon, not simply as a public resource but, more broadly, as operating in the public sphere, where democratic practices of persuasion are vital to its function. The persuasive, rhetorical edge of cultural heritage is important because it gives access to the negotiations between, on the one hand, the diverse context-specific practices of heritage with, on the other hand, the institutional power and structural inequalities that broadly shape the conditions of these practices. In other words, rhetoric foregrounds the give-and-take between heritage practices and their institutional and structural constraints. Rhetoric is different from the discursive emphasis of something like AHD or Foucauldian discourse analysis because it focuses on how words mobilize actions and effect change, how concepts become operationalized in daily life. Thus, rhetorical approaches to cultural heritage should be understood as practice-oriented, linking the dialectic of structure (institutional frameworks and discourses) and agency (“on-the-ground” action), rather than being a discursive approach to heritage.

The turn toward critical heritage has also in large measure been an ethnographic turn for heritage studies. With each passing year, more and more research on heritage is being described as ethnographic, and increasingly heritage researchers from outside the field of sociocultural anthropology are identifying themselves as ethnographers. Anthropologists worry that the long practical engagement in anthropology with the ethics of ethnographic fieldwork has not likewise been picked up with the methods. At root is the concern that scholars and practitioners undertaking ethnographic heritage work have not been trained in ethnography, in the triumvirate of method, theory, and ethics that undergirds such research.

To make such a statement is an uncomfortable position for an anthropologist to occupy, as some gate-keeper invested in methodological fetishism. This is because no classic rulebook or textbook exists on ethnographic methods, which anthropologists could throw down on the

interdisciplinary table and demand others to read. Methodological textbooks exist, but they are understood more as toolkits, with the specific methods to be used depending on the research questions being asked and the situations encountered in the field. Anthropologists also have a developed sense of ethnography's limitations, what it can be made to do and what it cannot. Nevertheless, if not a rote prescription of methodological practices, ethnography is held together by something like an "anthropological sensibility," as Lisa Malkki describes in her book *Improvising Theory* (2007). In the book, Malkki details her advice to a doctoral student in political science on the implicit understandings and "things that go without saying" that anthropologists absorb during training for ethnographic research. The foremost among these is that ethnography is both a process and a practice, involving long-term, intensive ethnographic research that produces "situated knowledges," and which takes the form of a written product, also called an ethnography. The term "situated knowledges" is drawn from Donna Haraway's (1991) work outlining a feminist philosophy of science, and aptly describes the kind of bottom-up attention to multiple perspectives for which heritage researchers adopt ethnography.

Malkki goes on to describe ethnography as three interrelated practices: (1) a critical theoretical practice, (2) a quotidian ethical practice, and (3) an improvisational practice. All three, taken together, are why ethnography makes a natural fit for heritage research. Malkki's description of ethnography as an improvisational practice is particularly helpful for framing ethnography not so much as a matter of methods as it is the intelligent and creative use of a repertoire of techniques, much like the creative force behind jazz improvisation. Learning the tools and techniques of ethnography only provides the foundations—necessary foundations—but it is then up to the ethnographer to take on the risk and responsibility of improvising on those foundations. Moreover, an intellectual flexibility and openness is required, to bring a sense of wonder to the research, where the capacity to be surprised is what separates a good ethnography from a poor one.

This brings us back to the question of ethnographic heritage, and how it might better assume an anthropological sensibility by practicing ethnography in a critical, ethical, and improvisatory manner. Training in ethnographic theory, techniques, and ethics is a must, as a foundation for ethnographic practice in the field. At the same time, it is the improvisatory art of ethnography that provides the opportunity for heritage

ethnography to develop as a legitimate undertaking. This is because ethnographic research on heritage will be shaped by the creative improvisation required within the specific contexts of fieldwork, while learning from key informants and collaborators, and the situated knowledges produced from these contexts and collaborations. Therefore, ethnographies on cultural heritage will not necessarily look like other ethnographies, but rather will carve out their own niche, one that fairly and accurately describes and characterizes the social condition of heritage in a way that other ethnographies could not. For example, in ethnoheritage a much more considered understanding of the interplay between historical and present conditions, as well as the mechanisms of social change, is required in order to be true to the work of heritage in the world. Simply put, the historic foundations of social, political, economic, and moral life have to be taken seriously, as do the creative reworkings of these foundations to meet present needs.

There are precedents for this sort of ethnography, in historical anthropology, ethnohistory, folklore studies, and looking further back to the origins of American anthropology with the four-field approach of Franz Boas and his students. It is the four-field tradition of anthropology in the United States that has proven particularly fertile grounds for ethnographic heritage. The four-field structure provides an institutional setting for cross-training students to think historically, about social change and process, as well as about contemporary life. Anthropological training in heritage is forging an integration of the two fields of sociocultural anthropology and archaeology, creating a third space—ethnoheritage—irreducible to either field.

### **Boasian Anthropology: The Four-Field Tradition**

Franz Boas is known as the founder of American anthropology for good reason. He established the first department of anthropology in the United States, at Columbia University, and during his prolific career taught and mentored many students. A number of these students then went on to found the other early anthropology departments in the United States. The Boasian school of anthropological thought that cohered around the work of Boas and his students was important for establishing a modern conception of culture, which saw culture as dynamic, in flux, and also learned (for reviews of Boas's work and legacy see Baker 1998, 2004; Bunzl 2004;

Cole 1999; Darnell 2001; Darnell et al. 2015; Lewis 2001a, 2001b; Stocking 1966, 1974; Whitfield 2010). Such a conception of culture is foundational for understanding the “cultural” half of cultural heritage, especially in light of the tools for rethinking heritage provided by intangible heritage, and the theoretical account of heritage argued for in these pages.

Clifford Geertz (1973: 22) has cited the “deepest theoretical dilemma” of anthropology to be reconciling the so-called “biological unity” of humankind with the “great natural variation of cultural forms.” This dilemma consumed early anthropological work, and set out the terms of debate within which Boasian anthropology distinguished itself from social evolutionists like E. B. Taylor, James Frazer, and Lewis Henry Morgan. At base was the problem of how to explain the similarities seen in human societies around the world, while also accounting for the differences. Of particular interest were explanations for similarities and differences seen to occur in geographically distant areas. The social evolutionists had explained these differences through a model of evolution, privileging the “unity of mankind” and a single set of laws. Another competing explanation during Boas’s time was diffusionism, which described similarities as proof of ancient migrations.

With the famous assertion that “The solid work is still all before us” (Boas 1896: 92), Boas arrived at the debate to say that anthropologists simply did not have the data yet to argue either grand theoretical position. What was needed was the meticulous and messy business of evidence-based research programs that rebuilt the specific historical trajectories and contexts of individual cultures. Basing arguments around the outward characteristics of cultures said nothing about the process by which they developed. For example, several cultures may share certain traits, like the use of masks in ritual practice. Social evolutionists might assert that using masks in ritual practice pegs those cultures as all being at a certain location along the trajectory of evolutionary development, but in fact the use of masks could have developed in those individual cultures for different reasons or according to different cultural processes. Thus, the primary logical argument for Boas against the social evolutionists was that *unlike causes produce like effects*, and therefore historical reconstruction was needed to disentangle the processes from results. The value that Boas ascribed to historical reconstruction—that in order to understand present circumstances one had to have a handle on past processes—is where we could say the interests of heritage first entered the anthropological script.