POSTMODERN A/ANTHROPOLOGY[1]

"The point is that we are *within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt. Ideological judgment on postmodernism today necessarily implies, one would think, a judgment on ourselves as well as on the artifacts in question."
—Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society"

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Despite the many differences in the various theoretical approaches that have been formulated in the discipline of anthropology—evolutionism, diffusionism, historical particularism, functionalism, culture and personality, neo-evolutionism, structuralism, sociobiology, and the new ethnography—there is at least one thing that they all have in common: each was devised on the basis of a unique set of epistemological and metaphysical doctrines in the context of an epoch of Western intellectual history typically called modernism. However, there is a newly emerging approach to the discipline of anthropology that separates itself and constitutes a line of demarcation from all of its modernist predecessors—one that has emerged from what is perceived to be the fissures, cracks and fault lines of modernism itself. Postmodern anthropology is, indeed, one of the aftershocks brought on by the recent intellectual earthquake of postmodernist philosophy,[2] which, with its radical deconstructionist methodology, is seismically shaking the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and truly, all the intellectual edifices that were constructed upon the foundation of modernism.[3]

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[1] I would like to especially acknowledge the help I have received from Pauline Rosenau's work, *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences* (1991) in the compostion of this paper. It content and structure is evident throughout.

[2] Postmodernism is sometimes synonmously refered to as deconstructionism which, as postmodernism's main methodology, will be explained later on in this paper. It is also often called "post-structuralism" which Rosenau (1991: 1) believes may be distinguished from postmodernism on the basis "of emphasis more than substance: Post-modernists are more oriented toward cultural critique while the post-structuralists emphasize method and epistemological matters…[such as] deconstruction, language, discourse, meaning and symbols while post-modernists cast a broader net."

[3] Postmodernism has indeed made inroads into many fields where we may not expect to find it. The areas in which postmodernism has at least begun to make its mark include forestry, engineering, management, industrial organization, property development, business, systems analysis, organizational analysis, accounting, public relations, public administration, corporate design, (see Rosenau 1991: 4 for references in the literature for postmodern influence in each of these areas) as well as in architecture, art, photography, literature, TV, video, film, rock music, and finally, style and fashion (see Connor 1989).

In the social sciences overall, there is what one observer has called a "post-modern-induced anarchy" (Dear 1988: 5, cited in Rosenau 1991: 3) the nature of which has been well described by Rosenau.

> Post-modernism haunts social science today. In a number of respects, some plausible and some preposterous, post-modern approaches dispute the underlying assumptions of mainstream social science and its research product over the last three decades. The challenges post-modernism poses seem endless. It rejects epistemological assumptions, refutes methodological conventions, resists knowledge claims, obscures all versions of truth, and dismisses policy recommendations (Rosenau 1991: 3).

This may sound like an overstatement, but probably it is not. Though some deem it faddish, and consequently, temporary, it would appear that post-modernism possesses more substance than most typical, trendy, intellectual fashions. Postmodernism is philosophical world view (Bertens 1986) complete with all the ontological, epistemological, and methodological components that in its most radical form dismisses the social sciences or in its softer versions seriously redefines them. Postmodernism in one form or another occasions "one of the greatest intellectual challenges to established knowledge of the twentieth century" (Wisdom 1987: 159, cited by Rosenau 1991: 5).

In anthropology itself, some think that postmodernism has become mainstream and believe that "the ingression of postmodernist thought and its tendency to undermine all efforts at legitimation of the scientific project" has precipitated a crisis in the discipline. Still others have conceived of "postmodernism as the most influential current in contemporary anthropology" in such a way that it "attempts to reformulate the professional task of the anthropologist" (Pels and Nencel 1991: 1-2). Overall, many anthropologists, especially those of the modernist ilk, believe that the ultimate goal of postmodern cogitation, in keeping with its deconstructive orientation, is to reduce the field of anthropology to a "mere fiction."

From the preceding comments it is easy to see why the arrival of post-modernism has become a veritable *casus belli*—provoking war among contemporary intellectuals in their attempts to either defend, redefine, or even dismiss their disciplines. In order to understand the impact of the postmodern paradigm on anthropology and the nature of the disciplinary warfare it has engendered, we must first compare and contrast it with the modernist paradigm it seeks to replace.

The premodern, modern and postmodern periods

Ascribing dates to intellectual epochs is always a precarious operation and this is certainly true of the chronological relationship of postmodernism to modernism, and of modernism's relationship to its predecessor which, for the sake of simplicity, we may call the pre-modern period. While some suggest that the period of the Renaissance as the *terminus a quo* of the modern era, others

have opined that its alpha point is to be found later in the teachings of the continental rationalist philosopher Rene Descartes (Toulmin 1990: 5-8). In any case, the intellectual architects of the modern period (the French *philosophes*, the Continental rationalists, the British empiricists, the German idealists, the Baconian scientists) sought, though they did not employ the term, to deconstruct the pre-modern period with its locus of authority in feudalism, the monarchy, and in the religious and theological pronouncements of the church. In general, the modernist agenda was liberation—freeing the newly emerging individual from the oppressive powers of superstition, ignorance, and irrationality, replacing faith with reason, and the dictums of scripture with the empirically grounded findings of science. Confident in its new outlook and methods, the modern period, with exuberant rhetorical flourishes, boasted that it would bring humankind into an unprecedented era of technological and social progress.

Modernity championed a number of invigorating intellectual propositions including the following:[4]

> 1. The autonomy of the individual as a rational, thinking, integrated person was high in priority. No longer was the human person to be subject to the authority of the church, state, or social structure, but by means of reason and/or experience, could determine for him or herself an independent course of life.

> 2. The distinction between human subject and external object, especially predicated on the Cartesian mind/body dualism, which enabled individuals to embrace and understand the nature of external and human reality without being affected by environment or cultural influences. Knowledge, in other words, could be entirely objective wherein subjective experience does not interfere with the objective knowledge. Reality is out there, and is capable of being understood and represented by the mind that is trained to mirror it. But this necessitates dualism. "The key implication of this position is that the mind is differentiated from whatever is known. For otherwise, reality could not be reflected in the mind, because these two elements would be identical" (Murphy 1989: 1). Only when the world is conceived of dualistically are objects referential and the whole is capable of being represented by human language.

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[4] Coombe (1991: 189) explains modernity in these terms: "In the sociological imagination modernity is an epoch characterized by the breakdown of feudal and religious orders in European societies, and by processes of rationalization, socio-economic differentiation, urbanization, and industrialization. In this context, the dominant intellectual project is that which we associate with the Enlightenment: the elaboration of the principles of an allegedly universal rationality. In the form of positivist social science, modern rationalism presented the individual and social life as governed by objective laws analogous to those imagined for the natural world." For other discussion of the character of modernity to pre- and post- modernity, see Toulmin 1989; Murphy 1989; Seidman and Wagner 1992).

3. Knowledge was deemed to be not only objective but also universal. Despite its critique of traditional metaphysics and religion, modernism never gave up on discovering, via science, comprehensive principles, laws and truths that bore universal application and that ultimately dovetailed into a comprehensive intellectual unity. Modernists sought to bask in the light of pure of coherent, unified truth. There were no incommensurable post-positivist paradigms to fragment knowledge claims.

4. Positive science with its objective and universal methods was able to arrive at certain empirical truth about the nature of humankind and the universe and would be the trustworthy guide into the race's prosperous future. Originally architected by Auguste Comte, his "Law of Three Stages" suggested that social disorder was engendered by humans acting from contradictory knowledge bases, the first two of the three being theological and philosophical which posited supra-sensible and uncon-firmed entities to explain natural and social phenomena. In the third stage, positive science would dominate, and be the source of universal, value-free objective truth that would not be subject to interpretation, but rather would provide the intellectual basis for social cohesion. The antecedent philosophically and religiously derived social disorder would thereby be displaced by social order and progress.

The discovery of truth was the aim of modern philosophy and science and overall, the Western intellectual tradition has been devoted to ascertaining the good, the true, and the beautiful. Its general *telos* has clearly been utopian—unmitigated social and scientific progress, creating the possibility, in American parlance, of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But postmodernists are forcefully challenging the entire modernist agenda and its "Enlightenment" project, suggesting that the entire enterprise has been a colossal failure and even a tragedy. The seeds of postmodernism, being planted in the soil of Western civilization for about the last 150 years, have recently germinated in the past two or three decades (since the early 1960s or 1970s). According to postmodernism, the record of modernity is clearly suspect. "…—world wars, the rise of Nazism, concentration camps, (in both east and west), genocide, worldwide depression, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Persian Gulf, and a widening gap between rich and poor…—[all this] make any belief in the idea of progress or faith in the future seem questionable. Post-modernists criticize all that modernity has engendered…." (Rosenau 1991: 5).[5] Advocates of

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[5] Here is the list of modernist values and entities that Rosenau (1991: 5-6) says postmodernism criticizes: "the accumulated experience of Western civilization, industrialization, urbanization, advanced technology, the nation state, life in the 'fast lane.' They challenge modern priorities: career, office, individual responsitility, bureaucracy, liberal democracy, tolerance, humanism, egalitarianism, detached experiment, evaluative criteria, neutral procedures, impersonal rules, and rationality."

this radical perspective have judged modernism by its fruit and found it wanting, concluding that little or no aspect of this overall world view is to be trusted. Indeed, anything that proclaims to be the avenue to the good, the true, and the beautiful, but instead produces the likes of the twentieth century, and anything that promises social and technological amelioration, but instead produces deterioration, is to be subjected to a hermeneutic of suspicion. Rather than leading to life, liberty, and happiness, modernism has become simply another tool of repression, oppression, and domination. Hence, just as the modernists sought to deconstruct the political, social, and ecclesiastical hegemony of pre-modernism, so now postmodernists seek to deconstruct the ratio-scientific program and authority of modernism in all of its manifestations, including the social sciences and anthropology which were its products. And we can almost imagine that postmodernists who seek to raze modernism are experiencing the pathos with which modernists went about dis-mantling pre-modernism.

It is undeniably true that the "anthropological tradition is intimately connected with the rise of modern Western society" and that anthropology originated in the 'ethno-logic of the West'" (Lemaire 1991: 37). Shweder notes that "anthropology assumed its modern form by stepping into the shadow of a pro-topositivist, protoexistentialist Nietzschian vision of reality" which amounts to a denial of any form of transcendence (God, gods, goddesses, ghosts, spirits, morality, sin, etc.) and to an privileging of positivist science with its hegemonic discourse as the sole arbiter of objective truth. But this "null reference, God-is-dead, phantoms-of-mind conception of culture" (Shweder 1989: 117) has two notable consequences, both of which are highly unacceptable to postmodernists.

The first is the degrading of other peoples and cultures which embrace some form of transcendence, however superstitious or primitive. Shweder notes how much the modern naturalistic anthropologist's attitude toward the primitive native with his/her supernatural orientation resembles the disdain of the positivist's conception of the metaphysician. It is a consequence of modernist anthropology with its, non-transcendent, "God-is-dead" orientation to represent "other" cultures as "the innocent, the romantic, the bizarre, the comic, the burlesque, the theatrical, or the absurd, as the history of culture becomes the record of mankind's sometimes staged sometimes passionate positing of, and pursuit after things that do not exist" (Shweder 1989: 120). Yet postmodern sensitivity, based on its value of nonexclusionism, regards such a hierarchical and patronizing stance toward the other or the alien as a baseless form of cultural imperialism, which today, is clearly not politically correct.

The second consequence of anthropology's conception by modernist parentage is the need to correct the naiveté of positive science. The whole story of post-positivist science has shown the scientific enterprise to be anything but pristine. Post-positive science has retreated from the notion of a scientific method that can objectively seek and discover the sum-total nature of reality without interference from biased scientists themselves and their paradigms. The story reveals not only that science is not entirely objective, but precisely the opposite, that "good reality-finding science has important elements that are inextricably subjective or discretionary," (Shweder 1991: 132) and, if I might add, interpretive.

The conclusion Shweder draws from this may be quoted at length (1989: 132, emphasis added).

> The message of all this for dedicated Nietzschians [i.e., moderns] is that it is time to shed one's skin and adopt a new philosophy of science. *It is time to move from the modern to the postmodern era.* In a post-Nietzschian world informed by postpositivist conceptions, objectivity, truth, and reality are inextricably associated with, and are not possible without, something prior contributed by the subject. Nothing intelligible remains of reality once you have "corrected" for all the possible prejudgments or "biases" of the observer, for all conceptions of reality are, in some measure, irrepressible acts of imaginative projection across the inherent gap between appearance and reality.
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> In that post-Nietzschian world God is not dead; only positivism and monotheism are dead. Polytheism is alive and well. Its doctrine is the relativistic idea of multiple objective worlds, and its commandment is participation in the never-ending process of overcoming partial [Western?] views.

Hence, as Coombe suggests, anthropology as a modernist project could possibly benefit from postmodern criticism at this increasingly self-reflective moment in the history of the discipline (1991: 188).

> My argument is that cultural anthropology—in its dominant guises known as "symbolic," "interpretive," or "hermeneutic" anthropology—is a modernist intellectual project, and that the discourse about postmodernism helps us to understand that project's shortcomings and suggests new avenues of departure for critical inquiry.

More insight about the origin and nature of postmodern thinking is needed at this point if the proposed critique and contribution of postmodernism to anthropology is to be properly understood.

The genealogy of postmodernism

Postmodern philosophy was inspired by German thought (Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger), developed by French philosophers (Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan), and has been imported into this country and spread throughout the academic community largely through the humanities disciplines, especially literary criticism (Stanley Fish, Terry Eagleton, etc.). Despite its German inspiration, contemporary German philosophers, especially Jürgen Habermas, (1981, 1983, 1986) are among it most severe critics. And though French philosophy is responsible for the development of the outlook, postmodernist philosophers, most notably Jacques Derrida, have fallen out of favor in their own country (Ferry and Renaut 1985, cited in Rosenau 1991: 12). Nonetheless, postmodern thinking continues to get a hearing, especially in this country, where its ideas seem to be growing in influence. Among anthropologists, those who have championed the postmodern rubric include

Stephen Tyler, James Clifford, and George Marcus. One of the headquarters for the postmodern emphasis in anthropology is found at Rice University in Houston, Texas where a group which calls itself the "Rice Circle" often meets for conversation about postmodern anthropological issues (Tyler 1986a: 46, note 1).

There are many intellectual tributaries that contribute to postmodernism's river. The viewpoint is a hodge-podge of thinking that creates an aura of disunity and fragmentation which are actually postmodern virtues. Each of the following academic enterprises has contributed elements that have been incorporated into the postmodern schema (Rosenau 1991: 13).

Western Marxists taught that modern science is a myth and the Enlightenment heritage is totalitarian and domineering.

Critical theory is suspicious of instrumental reason, modern technology, and the role of the media in a consumer society.

French Structuralism has lent to postmodernism its skepticism about humanism, the subject, and the author.

Nietzsche and Heidegger have promulgated a skepticism about truth, reason, moral universals, and an insistence that subjective and conflicting interpretations are the closest humans can get to understanding.

Nihilism shares with postmodernism a fundamental pessimism about life, the uncertainty of the human condition, and the idea that knowledge is contradictory.

Ethnomethodology has contributed to postmodernism's view that meaning varies from context to context.

Symbolic interaction suggests that the meaning of social relations is a human construction, not an objective reality.

Phenomenology (Edmund Husserl) encourages a review of personal knowledge, a rejection of logocentric world views (external, universally truthful propositions), and a suspicion of lessons from history.

Populism has contributed the notions of spontaneity, anti-intellectualism, and an idealization of the masses and their personal and private quotidian experience.

Anarchism has modeled the questioning of authority and rejected the imposition of any overarching, singular systemic point of view, and rather encourages tolerance for diversity and the contradictory.

Hermeneutics contributes to postmodernism's critique of empiricism, rationalism, universalistic science, and causality.

Romanticism is responsible, perhaps, for the mystical dimensions of postmodernism, including its fascination with fantasy, feelings, the meta-physical, the sacred, the exotic, the deviant, the primitive, and the bizarre. It also has contributed the notion of the lack of any absolute aesthetic standards of goodness, beauty, and truth.

Postmodernism is obviously a mixed bag of academic notions, and though it shares ideas with each of the areas cited above, it would not agree with other notions promulgated by the same domain of inquiry. Even though it glories in being a/systemic and fragmentary, it is possible to draw together several generic propositions that help to circumscribe the postmodern perspective even more.

1. Postmodernism rejects global, all encompassing world views of any and every kind whether it be Marxism, Christianity, Fascism, Stalinism, capitalism, socialism, liberal democracy, humanism, feminism, Islam, modern science, and so forth. From the postmodern perspective, each of the above *weltan-schauungen*, as well as others, are logocentric, transcendental, totalizing, meta- or grand narratives, master codes that rest on epistemological foundations no different from and no more substantiated than the most fanciful of belief systems (astrology, cults, mythology, etc.).

2. Postmodernism does not seek to offer itself or any other comprehensive scheme as a way of explaining reality. As a matter of fact, its purpose is exactly the opposite, namely, to deconstruct all reality maps, and to demonstrate the total lack of any epistemological foundations for certain knowledge of any kind (the resurrection of ancient Pyrrhonism!). The mature postmodern person must accept this fact and seek to live willy nilly in the presence of ambiguity, serendipity and relativity.

3. Postmodernism questions the truth value of various modern, binary conjunctions including the notions of the superiority of the present over the past, the modern over the pre-modern, the urban over the rural, the intellectual over the simpleton, the secular over the sacred, high culture over low culture, the rational over the irrational, etc. All that modernity has set aside or questioned, postmodernity seeks to rehabilitate and reinstitute, including the religious and the spiritual aspects of human existence (metaphysics, tradition, cosmology, magic, myth, scripture, mysticism, etc.).

4. Postmodernism sees the rigid definitions and academic boundaries (between the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, the arts, literature, culture and life, fiction and non-fiction, theory and practice, image and reality) as the remnants of modernity that are to be cast out and reconfigured. Postmodernism breaks through all these traditional distinctions, interpenetrates all subject areas, and is radically interdisciplinary in nature.

5. Postmodernism rejects modern styles of speech and discourse which, true to its scientific orientation, has been concerned with precision, clarity, rationality, and coherence. Conversely, postmodern discourse, which favors the

spoken over the written word, deploys unusual forms of oral and written discourse and uses surprising literary styles and genres with the goal of awaking and shocking the complacent modernist reader. In anthropology, the avante garde texts of Stephen Tyler present the best examples (1987).

6. Similarly, postmodern language is oftentimes notoriously difficulty to understand, and borders on being obscurantist and seemingly seeks to obfuscate rather than communicate.[6] Since postmodernists are skeptical about communication in the first place, they pay but scant attention to the way they write or speak. Instead they affirm that the linguistic playfulness is interesting in and of itself.

7. Postmodernism, especially postmodern social science, focuses on alternative constructs and meanings rather than on the typical goals, choices, behaviors, and attitudes prescribed by modernism. In other words, postmodernism seeks to de-center the center, and to center the de-centered.[7]

8. Postmodernists define everything, all phenomena and all events, as a "text" and seek to "locate" meaning rather than to determine it. No one "reading" (*vis a vis* interpretation) can be established over another as "true," and consequently no one "reading" can be privileged, or said to be better, or more accurate than another.

9. Postmodernism seeks to evaluate and rearrange the entire scientific enterprise, including the social sciences and anthropology. Over against the rigorous methods and objective goals of modern science, the post-modern perspective in the social sciences

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[6] For example, consider this obscure piece from Clough (1992: 5). "Thus a poststructural, semiotic approach to narrativity draws on psychoanalysis to understand narrative desire and its disavowal in the fantasmatic construction of a unified identity as the authorized subject (of reading and writing). If, as Rose suggests, it is the subject who reduces sexual difference to a crude anatomical opposition in the fantasmatic appropriation of the phallus, then it is the projection and displacement of the subject's oedipal fantasies that poststructural criticism proposes narrativity elicits in reading and writing."

[7] Postmodernism is exceedingly "multicultural" in that it concerns itself with that modernity has marginalized and never cared to understand including "the taken for granted, the neglected, the resisted, the forgotten, the irrational, the insignificant, the repressed, the borderline, the classical, the sacred, the traditional, the eccentric, the sublimated, the subjected, the rejected, the non-essential, the marginal, the peripheral, the excluded, the tenuous, the silenced, the accidental, the dispersed, the disqualified, the deferred, the disjointed (Rosenau 1991: 8). On this basis it would seem that one operative assumption of postmodernism, growing out of its relativism and subjectivism, is the non-exclusion of all things and people.

becomes a more subjective and humble enterprise as truth gives way to tentativeness. Confidence in emotion replaces efforts at impartial observation. Relativism is preferred to objectivity, fragmentation to totalization. Attempts to apply the model of natural science inquiry in the social sciences are rejected because post-modernists consider such methods to be part of the larger techno-scientific corrupting cultural imperative, originating in the West but spreading out to encompass the planet (Lyotard 1984, expressed by Rosenau 1991: 8).

Indeed, postmodern science has arrived at a propitious moment in its overall critique of the scientific research program of modernity. Since normal modern science has somewhat (1) failed to fulfill its promise of dramatic productivity, (2) been defiled by numerous abuses and frauds, (3) failed to live up to its own formal and objective standards, (4) showed itself incapable of solving the major problems of the twentieth century, (5) negated the metaphysical and mystical dimensions of human experience and even trivialized them, and finally (6) had little to say about the ethical ends to which knowledge should be applied, the postmodern scientific critique gains even more currency and engenders even greater skepticism about the omnipotence of the modernist project and its scientific spirit.

10. The postmodernism outlook is not homogeneous but is characterized by a variety of classifications and nuances of opinion. One fundamental distinction within the camp is between what could be termed hard and soft core postmodernists.[8] "Hard core" postmodernists represent the bleaker side of the paradigm, setting it forth as a virtual intellectual *memento mori*, reminding us of the death of the subject, the death of the author, the death of truth, the death of representation, the death of reality, etc. Hard core postmodernists are anti-subject, anti-representation, anti-history, anti-science, anti-modern, anti-hope, anti-humanist, anti-everything. The present age is a period of unsurpassed uncertainty and ambiguity, and the future will be hopelessly cruel and angst-ridden. For the hard core postmodernist, no social or political program is worthy of commitment, and even a temporary hiatus of pleasure and joy (playing with language) will collapse into a black hole of despair. This form of postmodernism is clearly nihilistic.

The soft core postmodernists find themselves caught between the Scylla of modernism and the Charybdis of postmodernism. They could also be called semi-postmodernists or semi-modernists because they do not fully embrace either of the two intellectual alternatives. They do not pursue their radical decon

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[8] In the literature, Rosenau (1991: 16, note 11) has isolated the following classifications among postmodernist representatives that roughly correspond to my hard and soft categories: establishment postmodernists (=soft) & critical or radical postmodernists (=hard); cool (=hard) & hot (=soft) postmodernists; deconstructive or eliminative (=hard) & constructive or revisionary (=soft); apocalyptic, desperate (=hard) & visionary, celebratory (=soft); neo-conservative (=soft) & post-structural postmodernists (=hard).

structionist agenda to its logical conclusion, but stop short in route to nihilism at an existential roadside park.

Seidman and Wagner have identified several social theorists who "attempt to find some middle ground between these two opposed images" and demonstrate that their "intermediate positions between modernism and post-modernism depend on the acceptance of different aspects of postmodernism, and are therefore rather idiosyncratic in character (1992: 11).[9] Soft postmodernists certainly share their hard core counterparts critique of many aspects of modernism. But in a contradictory mode, they are more optimistic about the present and future post-modern age, they engage in salvific political and social action, make ethical decisions, satisfy themselves with personal projects that range all the way from new age religion to new wave lifestyles. Soft postmodernists betray an inability to entirely cast off modernism since they refuse to put to death all that their compeers do (subject, author, truth, representation, reality, etc.). Soft postmodernists would, of course, be accused of inconsistency by hard postmodernists, but then again, inconsistency in postmodernism is more of a virtue than a vice.

To make this distinction between hard and soft core postmodernists is risky because the categories are not air-tight. Nonetheless, making this distinction helps to understand apparent contradictions within postmodernism and it also "allows us to explain how postmodernism can have such diverse applications in the social sciences," (Rosenau 1991: 17) including anthropology.

Now that I have created a general feeling for the nature of postmodernism philosophy, I would like to focus on five central topic that have a specific bearing on anthropology. These topics concern (1) the nature of the author, text, and reader; (2) the human subject; (3) theory and truth; (4) representation; and (5) epistemology and methodology. The following is thus presented as a taxonomy of postmodern a/anthropology.

A TAXONOMY OF POSTMODERN A/ANTHROPOLOGY

"Post-modern anthropology is the study of man 'talking.'"
—Stephen A. Tyler (1986: 23)

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[9] The "soft core" postmodernists seeking an idiosyncratic middle ground between modernism and postmodernism in the realm of social theory are identified, along with the titles of their essays by Seidman and Wagner (1992: 11-14) as follows: Richard Harvey Brown ("Social Science and Society as Discourse: Toward a Sociology for Civic Competence"); Stanley Aronowitz ("The Tensions of General Theory: Is Negative Dialectics All There Is?"); Craig Calhoun ("Culture, History, and the Problem of Specificity in Social Theory"); and Jeffrey Alexander ("General Theory in the Postpositivist Mode: The 'Epistemological Dilemma' and the Search for Present Reason").

Anthropology, in the context of the modernist paradigm, has defined itself, its central tasks, and its methods in ways analogous to the following that have become its established tradition:

Anthropology: "literally, the study of humans. …Anthropology is the study of people—their origins, their development, and contemporary variations wherever and whenever they have been found on the face of the earth" (Ferraro 1992: 2).

Culture: "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (E. B. Tylor 1973: 63; originally 1871); "everything that people have, think, and do as members of a society" (Ferraro 1992: 18).

Ethnography: "a subdivision of social/cultural anthropology concerned with describing a culture through the use of the techniques of long-term residence, learning the local language, intensive observation, and inter-views" (Williams 1990: 402).

Anthropology as science: "Anthropology can be considered a science because it involves the accumulation of systematic and reliable knowledge about an aspect of the universe carried out by empirical observation and interpreted in terms of the interrelating of concepts referable to empirical observation" (Pelto and Pelto 1978: 24, cited by Lett 1987: 43).

These traditional conceptions of anthropology, for so long the comfortable mainstay of the discipline, have the been object of review by postmodern anthropologists such that scarcely anything recognizable remains of them after the application of the deconstructionist's knife. Compare them with this rather lengthy profile of postmodern anthropology articulated by one of its leading proponents, Stephen Tyler (1986: 23).

Post-modern anthropology is the study of man "talking." Discourse is its object and its means. Discourse is at one a theoretical object and a practice, and it is this reflexivity between object and means that enables discourse, and that discourse creates. Discourse is the maker of the world, not its mirror. It represents the world only inasmuch as it is the world. The world is what we say it is, and what we speak of is the world. It is the "saying in which it comes to pass that world is made to appear" (Heidegger 1971: 101).

Post-modern anthropology replaces the visual metaphor of the world as what we see with a verbal metaphor in which world and word are mutually implicated, neither having priority of origin nor ontic dominance (cf. Tyler 1986[b]). Berkeley's esse est percipi becomes "to be is being spoken of." Post-modern anthropology rejects the priority of perception, and with it the idea that concepts are derived from "represented" sensory intuitions, that

the intelligible is the sensible "re-signed." There is no movement from original substance to derived "spirit," from thing to concept, from mind to material, or from the real to the less real. The mutuality of word, world, and mind is beyond time and space, located nowhere but found everywhere.

Seeing is always mediated by saying. Post-modern anthropology is thus the end of an illusion. It ends the separation of word and world created by writing and sustained by language-as-logos, that "univocal picture" projected in words from the standpoint of the all-seeing transcendental ego whose real message is that the world is a fable (cf. Nietzsche 1911: 24; Derrida 1976: 14).[10]

The concepts for which I presented a traditional anthropological under-standing are present somewhere in these three paragraphs, either implicitly or explicitly, and yet are radically reshaped by Tyler in light of postmodern precepts. This contour of postmodern anthropology barely resembles traditional anthropology at all. It is fair to ask: "Is this really anthropology? How has an-thropology progressed so far?" As I pointed out at the beginning, postmodernism seeks to redefine if not dismiss social science disciplines entirely, and Tyler's précis of postmodern anthropology seems to be a case in point.

An examination of five basic categories mentioned above may reveal to us how the move has been made from modern to postmodern anthropology.

Author, Text, and Reader

The modern and postmodern paradigms compared

The author: In the context of modernism, the author of a text was the cen-tral figure. In the composition of any form of literature, s/he wrote what s/he meant, and meant what s/he wrote. The author was the final source of author(ity) for the meaning of the text that s/he created. The consequent objective of interpretation was to discern the author's intended meaning through a variety of hermeneutical principles. The objective meaning of the text was the goal of in-terpretation.

While novelists or poets might simply write to entertain a reading audi-ence, those in the humanities and scientific disciplines were writing with the intent to inform, educate and enlighten the reading public, whether professional or popular. The writer was an agent who sought to communicate information and knowledge hoping to influence his or her readers in any one direction. Thus the

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[10] On the next page Tyler goes on to say: "The deconstruction of "things"—the object of perception—in the physical sciences, and the deconstruction of "selves"—the subject who perceives—in the social sciences are complete. The impudent moderns have stood Bacon on his head and left Descartes' *cogito* for dead" (1987: 24). Here he would seem to say that not only is reality ("things") dead, but so also is humanity. There is no subject left to undertake an anthropological study project and there are no objects, things, or people to study. Such an outlook leaves very little room, if any at all, for anthropology or any social or natural science.

author assumed a very powerful role that could be employed to further a number of social, economic, religious, or political causes. The author possessed great authority and assumed a position dominance over the text and the reader, thereby becoming a possible instrument of power. Perhaps for these reasons the saying was devised that "the pen is mightier than the sword."

Postmodernism calls for an end to this classic understanding of the author of a text and pronounces the modern author to be dead. Hard core post-modernists object to the role of the author for several reasons. They argue (1) that it is wrong to limit the meaning of a text to what the author intended, to so privilege the author of a text over its reader; (2) that given the ambiguity of language, ascertaining an author's intended meaning in a text is next to impossible anyway; (3) that understanding the context in which an author wrote is little help in locating the meaning of a text; (4) that authors as instruments of power subjugate readers to their implicit or explicit political agendas; and (5) that an elitist group of interpreters who claim to have privileged access to the meaning of an author's work breeds domination as well.

Rather than pronouncing authors to be dead, softer postmodernists place them in critical condition. They reduce the author's authority without destroying his or her existence and significance altogether. The author, through his or her text, enters into a dialogue with the reader, and instead of offering any kind of final objective pronouncements or transcendental truths, s/he sets forth "insights" to be considered by the postmodern reader who may freely reconstruct the text according to his or her own interpretive horizon.

Texts: As far as written texts are concerned, modernity understood them to be a medium of communication produced by an author embedded in a social, cultural and political context. The texts have an objective, knowable content that conveys the author's intended meaning. When precise hermeneutical principles were applied and when the existential setting of the author was taken into consideration, a text could be properly interpreted. Some interpretations were considered "better" than others depending on the skill of the interpreter. Modern readers listen to texts courteously and receive its message dutifully. Postmoderns call modern texts "readerly" (*lisible*) which are "to be read for a specific message, destined for a passive reader, and which resists being rewritten by the reader" (Rosenau 1991: 35).

Postmodernism thoroughly revises the nature textuality. First of all, in postmodern understanding, everything is considered to be a "text" and all texts are related to all other texts (a concept called "intertextuality," or, facetiously "textual intercourse"). Despite this universalizing of the meaning of the term, texts, by virtue of their linguistic nature, tend to deconstruct themselves, rendering no concrete meaning, only ambiguity. Once a text is authored, the author disappears and the text, like a prodigal son or Pinocchio, takes on a life of its own. Texts are privileged in postmodernism only insofar as they have an existence independent of their author. Texts contains no authoritative assertions and no objective truths; they are subject to revision and can sustain a plurality of meanings (readings). A postmodern text is a text at large, a linguistic free agent, an open-ended creation, a "machine for generating interpretations" (Eco 1983: 2, cited by Rosenau 1991: 35). Postmodern texts are called "writerly" (*scriptible*)

because they are capable of being "rewritten" by each reader's reading and subsequent re-readings.

Readers: The role of readers, as might be anticipated, has been greatly revised in the postmodern world view. The modern view subordinated readers to the author and text, viewing them as the caboose in the "author—text—reader" train. The modern reader of a text sought its true meaning, submitted to its message, and, according to postmodernism, became a potential victim of the text, subject to exploitation.

Postmodernism de-centers the author of a text, and re-centers the marginalized reader who becomes, not the caboose, but the "engine" in the re-designed "reader—text—writer" train. In the modernist construct, the author and text control the reader, but in the postmodern instance, the reader controls the author and text (or at least the text and reader sustain an interactive dialogue). The reader is no longer passive, but actively rewrites and constructs the text, giving it life, attributing it meaning, judging its content, revising its message. There are as many understandings (or readings) of a text as there are readers. The meaning of a text is whatever a reader says it is (limited by the reasonable boundaries of one's interpretive or linguistic community; see Fish 1980). Despite this new role ascribed to the postmodern reader, s/he assumes no position of power (in some misguided attempt to replace the power once possessed by the modernist author and/or text), cannot establish any sort of meta-paradigm or privileged knowledge base, and accepts the fact that the readings of all texts are ultimately flattened out on a plain of equality. Clifford (1983: 141), drawing on recent literary theory, has offered an encompassing description of the nature of reading ethnographic literature postmodernly.

> Recent literary theory suggests that the ability of a text to make sense in a coherent way depends less on the willed intentions of an originating author than on the creative activity of a reader. In Barthes' words, if a text is a "tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture," then "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" [1977: 146, 148]. The writing of ethnography, an unruly, multisubjective activity, is given coherence in particular acts of reading. But there is always a variety of possible readings (beyond merely individual appropriations), readings beyond the control of any single authority. One may approach a classic ethnography seeking simply to grasp the meanings that the researcher derives from represented cultural facts. But, as we have suggested, one may also read against the grain of the text's dominant voice, seeking out other, half-hidden authorities, reinterpreting the descriptions, texts and quotations gathered together by the writer. With the recent questioning of colonial styles of representations, with the expansion of literacy and ethnographic consciousness, new possibilities for reading (and thus for writing) cultural descriptions are emerging (see also Hammersley 1990).

The author is dead, the text is fluid, and the reader is in control. These hard core postmodernists notions have led some to the conclusion that post-modernism brings ethnography to its end, or to at least radically new ends (see

Clough's *The End(s) of Ethnography* 1992). Many softer postmodernists do not totally abandon the author, do not totally set the text free, and do not supply the reader with unlimited options. They do, however, suggest new understandings of what ethnography is and how it is to be done as the next section of this paper will indicate.

The implications of the postmodern revision
of author, text, and reader on anthropology

From the above considerations it should be clear that in the postmodern understanding of writing and reading is not done in the Enlightenment tradition as a quest for acquiring and communicating truth. No longer would an anthropologist/ethnographer as a writer/author/scholar seek to do scientific research on a given culture or cultural phenomenon, record the results of that scientific research project in the form of a text or scholarly treatise (book or article) in order to convey objective knowledge to a reading audience (popular, professional, student) who would seek to interpret accurately and understand clearly what the writer/author/scholar meant to communicate.

Rather, postmodern ethnography is more concerned with "questioning the authorial status of the anthropologist writer" (Strathern 1987: 258), showing "how ethnographic discourse can fail to apprehend the realities it attempts to describe and analyze," (Rosaldo 1987: 95), demonstrating how "ethnography is always caught up with the invention, not the representation of culture" (hence, fictive; Clifford and Marcus 1986: 2), suggesting how anthropological writings have served to perpetuate the hegemony of Western culture by constructing and perpetuating myths about the alien non-western other (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, Cohen 1989: 9),[11] and how readers of ethnography can actively encounter a text rather than passively receive it.

Postmodern writers are more occupied with textuality than factuality, with discourse than description. Anthropology has taken a literary and poetic turn (Poyatos 1988; Tyler 1984), become much more rhetorically self-conscious (Rosaldo 1987; Sangren 1988) and has been called by one observer "persuasive fiction" (Strathern 1987: 257). The new "ethnography as discourse" approach is causing anthropologists to experiment with new methods that take postmodern concerns into consideration (Marcus and Cushman 1982; Webster 1982).

> The text itself, not facts, is what counts for the postmodernists. The postmodernists are satisfied to conclude that what is really going on can never be stated definitively; in any case, it matters little because there is no single meaning for any text, for any political, social, economic event. An infinite number of interpretations of any scenario is possible (Rosenau 1991: 41).

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[11] There is the increasing recognition that ethnography has served political as well as objective, scholarly ends. The raising of political self-consciousness has been one of the more positive benefits of postmodern thinking on almost all of the disciplines.

According to Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen (1989: 9-10), postmodern anthropologists are exploring "new forms of writing that will reflect the newly problematized relationships among writer, reader, and subject matter in anthropology…." "Postmodern anthropologists claim that the aim of experimentation with such forms as intertextuality, dialogue, and self-referentiality is to demystify the anthropologists unitary authority and thus to include, and structure the relationships among the many voices clamoring for expression in the ethnographic situation."

One book that seeks to explore the ends and outs of the new postmodern ethnography is James Clifford and George Marcus's *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986; see also Marcus and Cushman 1982; Webster 1982; Atkinson 1992; Van Maanen 1988; Nencel and Pels 1991). This book explicates the relation between the ethnographic field situation and the style of the ethnographic text. One technique is the new use of dialogue which Clifford explains in the Introduction:

> It locates cultural interpretations in many sorts of reciprocal contexts, and it obliges writers to find diverse ways of rendering negotiated realities as multisubjective, power-laden, and incongruent. In this view, "culture" is always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, between subjects in relation to power (15).

Elsewhere, Clifford has suggested that ethnographic authority rests not so much on the more modernist participant/observer paradigm that has engendered ethnographic realism, but rather on a polyphony of voices that constitute a new form of ethnographic writing.

> Henceforth, neither the experience nor the interpretative activity of the scientific researcher can be considered innocent. It becomes necessary to conceive ethnography, not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed other reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects. Paradigms of experience and interpretation are yielding to paradigms of discourse, dialogue and polyphony (1983: 133).

By way of summary, postmodern ethnographers "who write cultural accounts are employing experimental writing techniques in an attempt to expose power relations embedded in any ethnographic work and to produce a text that is less encumbered with Western assumptions and categories than traditional ethnographies have been" (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, Cohen 1989: 10). The fact of the death of the modern author is not far removed from their similar pronouncement on the modern human subject.

The Subject

Close to the beginning of the twentieth century, F. Nietzsche announced to the world that "God is dead" (*Joyful Wisdom*). Now as the twentieth century

draws to a close, postmodernists are reading another obituary. Not only is God dead, but the modern human subject is dead as well.[12] The impact of the death of the subject on anthropology will be discussed after the meaning of this concept is first explained.

The modern human subject

The modern human subject that postmodernists seek to dissolve is an entity familiar to most of us, since most of us are one. The modern subject, in the most generic of terms, is a thoughtful, intellectual, visceral, and volitional being who seeks to grow and develop as a person. S/he possesses a self-image, a distinct identity, works hard, is personally disciplined, believes in some form of personal truth, recognizes the value of science and technology, makes commitments and pursues them, is socially, politically, religiously involved, establishes meaningful relationships, employs rationality, prizes education, follows social custom or convention, is knowledgeable, acts meaningfully, is law abiding, etc. Overall, the modern subject is a singular, integrated personality who has been constructed by the modernist values. There is something to this individual. Like peaches with a hard seed at the center, human subjects possesses an inward identity and vitality that is real, stable and enduring. It is this kind of modern human subject that postmodernism seeks to deconstruct and destroy.

The postmodern deconstruction
of the human subject

Drawing on the teachings of Nietzsche and Freud in their critique of human persons, postmodernists (especially Foucault and Derrida) have viewed the human subject as a symbol of all that modernity has stood for such as rationality, science, truth, objectivity, etc. Postmodernists see the modern subject as a creation of liberal, scientific, and Enlightenment humanism which has been used to justify Western superiority and cultural imperialism. Furthermore, postmodernists see the modern subject as the basis for the troublesome subject/object dualism which, in their estimation, has been the cause of unfortunate power relations, hierarchialism, the objectification of human beings as things, the claim to understand and represent reality, and the basis for promulgating logocentric meta-narratives that dominate others.

This type of modern person is unacceptable to the postmodernists and has to go. Consequently, postmodernists question severly the possibility of a unified, coherent human being with an integrated center and substance. The postmodern person lacks accountability, is irresponsible and independent, is severly solipsistic, denies truth and any form of final reality, rejects all grand or meta-narratives, debunks science, prefers the emotional to the rational, seeks out the unusual and the bizarre, denies the gravity of life and prefers whimsy,

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[12] For an overview of the predominate western conceptions of the individual see Morris1991; for an overview of the dilemmas of identity in postmodern life, see Gergen 1990)

and is unstable, decentered, subjective and yet is really no subject at all. Postmodernism proffers the notion that human beings are linguistically constructed, an "effect of discourse," an entity that is constituted by language which mediates all subjects and objects. Postmodern persons are not peaches, but onions: peel away the socially and linguistically constructed layers and you will find that nothing is left. Postmodern persons are docetic: they only seem to be real. Coombie (1991: 193, 197) has offered these thoughts about the of nature the postmodern non-person which begins with

> a rejection of the idea of the integrated personality in favour of an emphasis upon the multiple cultural intersections that constitute a conflicted subectivity. …—saturated with signifiers, but bereft of meaning—people appear no longer to be subjects or agents of history, but passive, withdrawn creatures playing games of pastiche with history's decorative surfaces.[13]

The implications on anthropology of the deconstructed of the subject

What kinds of implications does this dys/integration of the western Cartesian subect have on anthropology? What is the nature of a subjectless anthropology? To eliminate the subject, and by implication objects (who are really just other subjects being analysed) and thus to eliminate the subject/object distinction by eliminating the subject would seem to devastate anthropology since there would be no studying subjects and no objects to study. "…many believe that the very existence of the ethnographer implies a subject status. But some feel that to erase the distinction between the ethnographer and the subject being studied would be to do away with the field itself" (Rosenau 1991: 51).

Because this would seem to be the logical outcome of the ontological destruction of the subject, softer postmodernists are proposing the necessary return of a disembodied postmodern subject to revitalize the social sciences and anthropology. The returning postmodern subject would not bear the ratio-scientific marks of modernism, but rather would be characterized by the evanescence of postmodernism. The resurrection of this ephemeral human personage would at least provide some kind of *raison d'etre* for anthropology. The difference would be the in the nature of the anthropologist him/herself and in the nature of the subject/object studied. A milder form of dualism would reign, one that would not elevate the anthropologist over the native, but one that would locate both on the same postmodern level. No heirarchy, no power plays, no superior/inferior

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[13] Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen (1989: 15-16) point out that the postmodern "claim that undermines the ontological status of the subject [comes] at the very time when women and non-Western peoples have begun to claim themselves as subject." They suggest that postmodern theorizing, primarily the work of Western white males, should possibly be understood as a socially constructed and politcally motivated maneuver "to preserve the privileged position of Western white males."

relations, but rather a relationship of reciprocity would ensue and a mutuality of voices would be heard. All the evils that modernity's dualism has created would seek to be avoided by postmodernity's revised newly conceived subject/object relationship. In this regard, Strathern (1987: 264) has set forth postmodernism's bottom line as it concerns the subject/object relationship in the making of ethnography.

> Over the last decade or two, there has been increasing awareness that the dichotomies which characterised modernism in anthropology will not do, the easiest target being synchrony, the timelessness of descriptions framed not by history but by the distinction between "us" and "them." In fact, there has always been criticism of the ahistoricity of anthropology, in the misleading charge that anthropologists create an idealised break between the pristine society "before contact" and the "social change" since…. This has joined with mounting criticism about the audacity of the anthropologist to speak for the other, to treat other persons as objects, not allowing the authors of accounts their own voice, and so on. In short, that powerful modernist frame, the distinction between us and them which created the context for positioning the writer in relation to those he/she was describing, has become thoroughly discredited. The other as literary object, being taken by critics as situating human subjects as objects, can no longer survive as the explicit organising frame of texts. No one set of voices should be denied or privileged—the author must objectify his own position in the ethnography quite as much as he or she strives to render the subjectivity of others.

Though she does not state it explicitly, the reason why the modern "distinction between us and them which created the context for positioning the writer in relation to those he/she was describing, has become thoroughly discredited" is because of the death of the subject. Only when the subject-superiority of the Western humanistic anthropologist over the inferior alien\other that is the object of study is demolished can non-hierarchical relationships of reciprocity exist and a non-privileged polyphony of voices be heard. These values themselves ultimately flow from postmodernism's assumption of non-exclusion or multiculturalism which itself is derived from its foundational epistemological relativism. In a sense, these conceptions fit quite nicely with anthropology's historic notion of cultural relativism and relate directly to their understanding of truth and theory.

Truth and Theory

Postmodern rejection of truth

Truth—whether it be understood as that which corresponds to reality, as something which coheres within a system of thought, or as concepts which "work" (pragmatism)—truth, according to postmodernists, is an Enlightenment concept, the very essence of modernist thinking. "True truth" implies the methods

of science for its discovery, the principles of logic for its communication, and presupposes the universal nature of its application. Given this understanding of the nature of truth as the heritage of the Enlightenment, it is no wonder postmodernists reject it.

According to postmodernists, truth is a function not of reality but of language. Truth is a linguistic convention, the effect of discourse. Language itself is always ambiguous and unable to communicate effectively. Language as a system of signs is cut off from reality and is unable to represent it. Language thus creates a solipsistic world for its user and such a linguistically constructed world could never bear truth for all people in all places at all times. Hardly. At best linguistically constructed truth and reality is merely private and local, creating only the appearance of universal applicability. At bottom, linguistically constructed forms of truth are all equal in nature and value.

Not only is truth a product of language, but "truth," so-called, has been the instrument of oppression and terror. "Truth" has been used by those in power to retain their power. "Truth" silences and excludes those who would disagree with the powerful who possess and wield truth, a disagreement that could be consequential. For these reasons and others, postmodernists, especially of the more radical kind, have rejected the notion of truth.

Softer versions of postmodernism redefine truth in a couple of ways to make it acceptable. First, they grant that truth is possible at a local, personal, or communal level. There may be a multiplicity of relative objectivities, but no overarching absolute, objective truth. Micro-political and personal truths, yes; macro-political and personal Truth, no! Second, those who retain truth would not say that all proclamations of truth are equal, and even though soft postmoderns are relativists, nonetheless, they opine that certain truths are simply not as acceptable as others (genocide, anyone?). The postmodern aversion to truth also carrys over to their rejection of theory.

Postmodern rejection of theory

Theory-building, which has been one of the main preoccupations of anthropologists throughout the discipline's history (Harris 1968), is decisively set aside by postmodernists. Postmodernists recognize the totalizing tendencies of overarching theoretical constructs and instead prefer the possibility and presence of a multiplicity of theories, though none can claim superiority over others. Theory building assumes access to reality and the reliability of language to represent it; postmodernism denies both of these necessary factors. Theory building is reductionistic in that it cannot do justice to exceedingly complex realities; consequently, theories limit understanding, by their design resist alternative readings of "texts"; theories seek to order and control, and impose changlessness and rigidity on a changing, Heraclitian world; theories by their nature exclude those who do not share them; theories can become ideological instruments of power and oppression; theories are falsely promoted through propoganda and rhetoric. For these, and I am sure other reasons, theory building is significantly diminished in postmodernism.

As usual, not all postmodernists are as extreme in their renunciation of the theory-making endeavor. Though just about all postmodernists recognize the

liabilities of theoretical systems, they also recognize the impossibility of doing without it entirely. After all, isn't postmodernism itself some kind of a theoretical fabrication?

The more affirmative postmodernists embrace a less hostile attitude toward theory-building which still sounds quite exotic when compared to the modern viewpoint. "Postmodern theory…is unsystematic, heterological, de-centered, ever changing, and local. Nonrepresentational, it is personal in character and community-specific in focus. Their de-centered theory is said to be valuable for its own sake and never to claim special authority for itself" (Rosenau 1991: 83).

The postmodern researcher, instead of focusing on theory-building, pursues two other tracks. First is a concentration on the analysis of the "texts" of everyday life—the *quotidien,* as they call it. Modernism has focused on the macro-level and have constructed grand theories to explain the "mega-texts" of human life. Postmodernism, by way of contrast, highlights the micro-level, the daily, the small, the ordinary, the seemingly insignificant, for they feel that a rich, empirical description and deep understanding of what goes on in common experience is just as enriching, if not more so, than what the modernists emphasize. The second focus of theory-rejecting postmodernists is an understanding of micro-narrativity, the mini-narrative rather than the meta-narrative, especially the "stories" of those who are disenfranchised. These small scale world views supply the mythology, wisdom, folklore, tradition, etc. of a localized community of people, and are viewed, not as overarching paradigms, but simply as one approach to or interpretation of life among many.

The implications of the postmodern rejection of truth and theory on anthropology

If a contemporary anthropologist were to embrace postmodernism, then it would seem that the package deal would include forfeiting the goal of seeking truth and constructing explanatory theories of culture. Historically, anthropology has been dedicated to the discovery of universal laws, patterns and regularities in human cultures that qualify as truth to help explain the mysteries and phenomena of the human condition. Even while upholding the sacred cow of anthropology—cultural relativism—anthropologists still believed they could discern truth and order amidst the diversities of human cultural experience. But if postmodernism becomes mainstream in anthropology, this objective will, of necessity, be abandoned.

Furthermore, anthropologists will have to forego both the refining of old theoretical paradigms and cease the attempt to construct any new ones.[14]

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[14] This non-theoretical, or anti-theoretical emphasis brought to anthropology by the postmodernists would no doubt please, though perhaps for different reasons, the most non-theoretical anthropological practitioner of them all, Franz Boas. According to Harris, Boas was "inductive to the point of self-destruction" for in his (Harris') estimation, "…to deprive science of speculation altogether is to deprive it of its very life blood" (1968: 286).

Serious theorizing would be deemed out of order as an unwarranted, unwanted activity.

> When postmodern anthropologists give up truth and theory they simultaneously give up authority and responsibility. The monological authority of the ethnographer who sets out to study an exotic people in a far away land is no longer defensible because the goal of such activity, the formulation of theory and truth, is no longer legitimate. The truth of an anthropological text then depends not on the "willed intentions of an originating author," but rather on the "creative activity of a reader" (Rosenau 1991: 88; quotes from Clifford 1988: 520).

Thus, if the formulation of truth and theory is no longer legitimate, then the postmodern anthropologist can spend his or her time seeking a deep understanding of the *quotidian* of an indigenous people. S/he may actively engage in a penetrating understanding of a people's micronarrative, their fundamental outlook on human life and experience. There could be intense looks at myths, chronicles, fantasies, stories, world views, etc. that could be communicated ethnographically, not as truth, but as interpreted, dialogic, polyphonic, experiential "content,"—mere poetics, fiction, allegory. There would also be the goal of examining anthropological discourse as a discourse in and for itself, the anthropological equivalent of ordinary language analysis in philosophy. Stephen Tyler accentuates several of the preceeding themes in the following quotes from his article "The Poetic Turn in Postmodern Anthropology (1984: 328-29).

> Postmodern anthropology is relativistic in a new sense, for its denies that the discourse of one culture can analytically encompass the discourse of another cultural tradition.

> Postmodern anthropology reduces the idea of system [theory]—in both its mechanistic and organismic versions—to a trope, a way of speaking relative to the purpose of a discourse.

> The discourse of postmodern anthropology does not demonstrate by logical proof alone; it reveals by paradox, myth, and enigma, and it persuades by showing, reminding, hinting, and evoking. It does not locate meaning solely in the seeming certitudes of that clear, precise, and unambiguous ratio of the Cartesian mythos, but seeks it as well in the ambiguities oratio.

> …anthropology is now a discourse for itself…. …[Tyler offers] the expression of an impression that the discourse has lost its way and has forgotten the metaphors of its founding pathos, for its has become a discourse that seeks less to interpret alien cultures than to interpret itself—a discourse whose whole aim is not to make the aliens understandable within the context of their own beliefs, but to sanitize them, to remove the threat of their differences by washing them in the waters of the universals

of scientific method and thus to anesthetize our consciousness of their differences and make them fit for the context of our beliefs.

The conception that anthropology is discourse in and for itself is the result not only of the abandonment of truth and theory, but also because of the repudiation of epistemological representation.

Representation

Postmodernism has put another trumpet to its lips, this time heralding the end of the order of representation. Representation, like the other concepts assailed by postmodernism, has been central to modernist science, social theory, politics and philosophy. Representation simply involves "re-presenting one thing, person, place, or time as (or in) another thing, person, place or time; it is assumed that the transference is made without loss of content or violation of intention" (Rosenau 1991: 93). Now if it is true, at least traditionally so, that the task of anthropology is "to describe, in the broadest sense, what it means to be human," (Ferraro 1992: 2), then the implications of the dissolution of the simple capacity to accurately describe or represent are pervasive. Why do postmodernists reject representation?

Postmodern critique of representation

First of all, representation assumes that there is an external, objective, verifiable reality out there that can be represented or described; but postmodernist deny any such form of prime reality. Additionally, referencing a real world would imply universal truth, an equally reprehensible notion to postmodernists.

Second, even if there was a reality to represent, it would have to be done by language, with signifiers (words) and a signified (things); but in postmodern thought, the separation of signifiers and the signified in the Saussurian and Peircean semiotic sense has collapsed in such a way that sign and signified are mutually constituted in saying thereby emphasizing their interpenetrability and mutuality (Tyler 1986: 42,44). Hence, words are only symbolic representations with no direct relation to the world. It thus seems impossible to represent any reality with language. Rather than any real world determining what its signs mean, rather the sign/signified construct (language) determines what reality is. Reality is linguistically constructed!

Third, representation supposes a virtual univocal referential status of words, symbols, images, and meanings, such that everyone will understand the same thing by the same sign. However, for any kind of sign there seems to be a plurality of possible significations which makes the use of signs quite slippery (i.e., ambiguous and unclear).

Fourth, postmodernists fault representation because it tends to generalization, and generalization obscures the heterogeneous, complex nature of things (différance).

Fifth, representation is always actually indeterminate because of the differences between things and the things used to represent them. If different things are used to represent different things, then how can one understand anything? Furthermore, all representations are a representation of a representation *ad infinitum* in an infinite representational regress. There is no way to get to ultimate reality via represenation. Hence, there is no content to society or to reality apart from the rhetoric of representation.

Sixth, the demise of representation is vitally connected with the death of the author, subject, truth and theory. If representation is dead, then so are these; and\or if these are dead, then so is representation!

Finally, in the modern era, representation has proven itself to be dangerous. It signifies mastery, distortion, finality, even though all representation is socially, politically, economically, culturally, linguistically, religiously, and epistemologically arbitrary or relative.

In light of the ousting of representation, Deleuze is correct when he writes: "We are wrong to believe in facts; there are only signs. We are wrong to believe in truth; there are only interpretations" (Murphy 1989: 39). For postmodernists, then, there are many advantages to eliminating representation.

> The chief advantage to eliminating the idea of representation is that representation emphasizes the difference between sign and signified. There is always a constant world of things and a separate world of signs: the essential problematic is one of words and things. Representation leads us to overemphasize mimesis, description, and correspondence theories of truth, and tricks us into thinking of language as if it were a form of calculus (Tyler 1986: 43-44).

The implications of the postmodern rejection of representation on anthropology

What are the implications of the postmodern rejection of representation on anthropology? Murphy offers a cogent answer to this question in these words (Murphy 1989: 33).

> Subsequent to postmodernism, the simple representation of reality is impossible. Neither knowledge nor order is denotative. The reason for this is that language blocks access to indutable standards. Existence is a game played with language, from which no one escapes. …Social analysis, consequently, must be undertaken from within language.

If it is true that the postmodern denial of representation means that all social analysis must be "undertaken from within language," then this means death for both traditional ethnography and for classical comparative analysis.

In regard to comparative socio-cultural analysis, if it is truly impossible to represent anything at all, then it would never be possible to even identify those things that might be compared and contrasted. Also, if everything is unique, or incommensurable as postmodernism says it is, if no one thing can accurately be

compared with or used to express another, then attempts to search for similarities is doomed from the start. Only novelty exists.

Since anthropology has been acutely concerned with writing accurate descriptions of what is really found out there on fieldwork expeditions, to cut off the possibility of representing those cultural and social realities means either giving up on ethnography altogether, or conceiving of new ways to write that do not so much represent, but rather "evoke." "Evoking is preferable to representing because it is assumed to free one of objects, facts, descriptions, generalizations, experiements and truth" (Rosenau 1991: 106). Tyler, who says that "the greatest problem for post-modern anthropology is either to give up on writing altogether or to achieve by written means what speech creates without simply imitating speech" (1986: 45), describes this new process of evocative ethnography in place of the old representational version of modernity.

> Modernists sought a form of writing more in keeping with "things," emphasizing, in imitation of modern science, the descriptive function of writing—writing a "picture of reality." This is not "realism" but "surrealism." Post-modern writing rejects this modernist mimesis in favor of a writing that "evokes" or "calls to mind," not by completion and similarity but by suggestion and difference. The function of the text is not to depict or reveal within itself what it says. The text is "seen through" by what it cannot say. It shows what it cannot say [reality?] and says what it cannot show [also reality?; 1986: 45].

Here is an example of what Murphy possibly meant when above he averred that "…social analysis, consequently, must be undertaken from within language." But just how valuable is an ethnography that merely evokes? We cannot help but wonder if anthropology, without representation, will survive as a discipline for very long. Because this concept is so crucial to the social sciences and to anthropology, it is no wonder that the controversy over it has been particularly fierce. But the battle raging over the role of postmodern metaphysics, epistemology and methodology is also equally brutal.

Metaphysics, Epistemology
and Methodology

We have finally reached a point in this study of considering some foundational issues that might help make sense of the rather offbeat postmodern doctrines that we have discussed in the preceeding sections. An overview of postmodern notions of reality, knowledge, and methods and their implications for anthropology will bring this entire discussion into focus.

Postmodern metaphysics

Modern natural and social scientists believed in the existence of some kind of external reality and sought to discover what it was like. Moderns were metaphysical, but postmoderns are not, at least not in the same sense. Many postmoderns deny the need for and existence of "reality" at all. Reality, if they

attempt to conceive of it, is not represented by signs; rather signs produce reality. Additionally, reality itself is the consequence, not the cause of scientific activity.

Whatever reality is there, it is surely a human product in any one of three possible ways. The *constructivist* approach is quite Kantian and seems to suggest that the categories of our minds create reality. According to Gergen, "to the extent that the mind furnishes the categories of understanding, there are no real world objects of study other than those inherent within the mental makeup of persons" (Gergen 1986: 141, cited by Rosenau 1991: 110). The *paradigmatic* approach, which seems to be quite Kuhnian, avers that reality is the consequence of a shared paradigmatic understanding that contains and circumscribes all knowledge and shared discourse. Reality, thus, becomes a function of the predominate paradigm. The third view, which shares an affinity with the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis, is that reality is *linguistically* constructed. Human beings and reality are reduced to the language they speak (and write). To describe themselves as linguistically produced beings, postmoderns could even adopt (non-contextually) the biblical phrase uttered by the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, who when asked about his identity by the Pharisees, said: "I am a *voice*!" (John 1: 23).[15]

Whether reality for postmoderns is mentally, paradigmatically or linguistically constructed, there seems to be no way or concern to ascertain exactly what it is (as the moderns hoped to do). This metaphysical agnosticism which cuts off human beings from their surroundings so radically would seem in an analogous way to shut off social scientists from social and cultural reality they hope(d) to

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[15] This linguistic understanding or reality seems to bear very close affinities to the infamous Sapir/Whorf hypothesis which seems to so closely associate language and culture that the latter is understood as a function of the former. Here's how this thesis has been described in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (16: 536).

> Language is culture, culture is stated in language; language mediates action, action is described in language. Accordingly, cultures, as systems of behavior, have their being in and are known from the ideas that man forms concerning the universe about him. Man's ideas about the universe consist of what he says about it when talking to himself; he talks to himself in the language he learns from those who nurture and teach him. When man talks to his fellows, he is uttering the ideas that he formed by talking to himself. These utterances impel those who listen to engage in culturally approved actions; the actions are the behavior of the society whose culture was being talked about. The pathways from language to culture and from culture to language, from culture to social behavior and from social behavior, form closed circles, and movement along these pathways is constant.

Linguistically oriented postmodernism has seemed to resurrect fresh interest in the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis in understanding what the role of language actually is in the establishment of cultures and in our perceptions of reality (see Hill and Mannheim 1992; Mathiot 1979; Mühlhäusler and Harré 1990; Holland and Quinn 1987)

understand. The ensuing result is a form of disciplinary agnosticism that, (at least within modernism) would call the value of the entire field of study into serious question.

There is one interesting proposal set forth by T. R. Young (1991) from the perspective of the physical sciences which posits "chaos theory" as a metaphysics for the postmodern. Chaos theory would provide grounding for rejecting positive science's own rejection of metaphysics and would provide a basis for reuniting science with philosophy and aesthetics. According to one commentator on the proposal (Ashley 1991: 286), the advent of chaos theory challenges the ideas of determinateness and closure posited by modern science and opens up a view of ontology that may be extrapolated to social theory. Young specifies the nature of this connection in the abstract of his article (1991: 289).

> Henceforth, all social theory must be change theory. Chaos findings demonstrate that natural systems are fractal in their ontology and nonlinear in their dynamics. …Chaos findings decenter all claims of perfection, finality, normality or historical necessity and thus provide an elegant theoretical envelop in which to locate postmodern science and politics. In social terms, near-to-stable systems embodying the ethics and aesthetics of a praxis society are possible if destabilizing bifurcations in wealth, power, and status are avoided. The postmodern quest in emancipatory social science is a search for those attractors which produce an infinite number of near-to-stable interations of social dynamics congenial to praxis.

While Young's proposal is exploratory, it does provide a connection between chaos theory and the dismantling of traditional modernist epistemologies. This is done, not by speculative philosophy, but by positing a certain scientific understanding of reality the nature of which might suggest insights into a new postmodern approach to the social sciences and anthropology.

Postmodern epistemology

Causality, predictability and postmodern intertextuality: Postmoderns reject the fundamental modern scientific ideas of causality and prediction, which, they say, in a world as complex and as tightly interwoven as our is, are impossible to establish. In its place, postmoderns substitute the notion of intertextuality. Intertextuality suggests that everything is related to everything else, that existence is truly a seemless web of complex, intertwined, chaotic events that are impossible to unravel. Hence the discovery of causality and the ability to predict is forever lost. No explanation of causality is possible because of randomness or because of the immensly tight interwebbing of all things. But if causality and predictability are lost, what does this do to the nature of science in general and anthropology in particular?

Objectivity and relativism: At this point in our study it should come as no surprise that whereas modernism prized objectivity and shunned relativism, postmodernists are anti-objectivists and pro-relativists. Given their essential

nihilism—the death of reality, subjects, authors, truth, theory, etc.—there is no foundation for ultimate objectivity or the privileging of one world model over another. There is no real reality, only reality constructs. If there are only individual reality constructs, how then could any one viewpoint be favored over another (except perhaps politically or in terms of the relations of power)? The denial of the really real and the affirmation of solipsistic models is the foundation for postmodernism's anti-objectivists and pro-relativist outlook.

In anthropology, this philosophical relativism takes its historic position of cultural relativism one step farther by saying that no only should a cultural tradition be understood in the context of its own and not another's values (Ferraro 1992: 332), but also that no one set of cultural values are necessarily any better than any other.

The role of reason: The death of the human subject would imply the death of human reason as well. Postmodernists lay reason in the grave along with everything else modernity has espoused. This burial, however, is not without postmodern reasons. First, it has become clear to postmodernists that reason does not reason objectively but subjectively, on the basis of previously held assumptions that are subjective to the reasoner. Hence, reason is no more "rational" than or different from myths, religions, cults, magic, etc. In fact, reason is rhetorical. Second, reason would assume a universal, absolute understanding and application of knowledge and truth and there is simply no place for these kind of notions in postmodernism. Third, reason is associated closely with the modern period, and like other products of modernity, it tends to dominate, oppress, etc. Furthermore, reason, in its practical application, has actually failed to solve many of the problems that modernity has created by its prior application. Fourth, reason is exalted over emotion in modernity, but in postmodernity, emotions and the like are exalted over reason. The time of the dominion of the head over the heart has passed. What, then, will become of rationality in a postmodern world?

And how will this "passing" of rationality affect anthropology? This issue is closely related to the impact of the demise of causation and prediction on anthropology. The loss of all three creates a scientifically emasculated discipline. Anthropology is no longer a ratio-scientific enterprise, but an emotional/intuitive operation. It would not be science, but science(tist)-fiction.

Postmodern methodology

Hermeneutics: Interpretation in the modernist model is objective, testable, true (or false), scientific, etc. Postmodern interpretation is anti-objectivist and intuitive. In postmodernism, interpretations differ from person to person and are individualized, relative, uncertain, diverse, multiple, etc. No interpretation of any text can be elevated over any other. All viewpoints are equal.

The net effect on anthropology here would be the neutralizing and neuterizing, solipsizing and surrendering of all viewpoints. Any anthropological expostulation about any culture, or any culture concept would simply be platonic opinion (*doxa* as Plato called it, pure appearance, not reality). There would be no

way to adjudicate between "doxalogics," nothing but a cacophony of anthropological voices all speaking at once.

Deconstruction: As a method, deconstruction is a form of *critical thinking* in the pejorative sense of the word. "Deconstruction involves demystifying a text, tearing it apart to reveal its internal, arbitrary hierarchies and its presuppositions. It lays out the flaws and latent metaphysical structures of a text. A deconstructive reading of a text seeks to discover its ambivalence, blindness, logocentricity" (Rosenau 1991: 120). The deconstruction of texts is not undertaken with a view to offering a creative alternative, but simply to disclose the vulnerabilities and foibles of antecedent interpretations. In postmodern thinking, there are no alternatives, not even itself. Ultimately, the only postmodern choice is between nihilism on the one had and nihilism on the other.

In anthropology, the deconstructionist method has been used to manifest the various forms of hegemonic content in ethnographic writings and theorizing that have, unconsciously perhaps, been used for power purposes, especially to advance the thought and culture of the modern west. Thanks to deconstructionism, anthropology has become much more politically and rhetorically conscious. But this method has also been used to tear apart the most treasured methods and goals of the discipline. Its presence in anthropology is bitter/sweet.

Now we will attempt to tie this entire paper together in a summary, a critique and a conclusion.

SUMMARY

I would like to summarize the gist of this presentation of postmodern a/anthropology in a few simple "reader's digest" paragraphs and corresponding charts.

Author, text, reader

Postmodernism announces that the author is dead, the text is open-ended, and the reader is empowered. For anthropology this means that ethnographers no longer compose to communicate truth with authority to a passive readership. Rather they seek a new kind of ethnography that dethrones the author, enlivens the text, and energizes the reader to seek individual and novel meanings in the material presented. This model truly eliminates the authority of the author, opens up interpretations, and rehabiliates the process of reading.

Category	PM Perspective	Anthropological Implications
Author	Dead	Dethroned, unauthorized
Text	Opened	Intertextual, dialogic, polyphonic
Reader	Empowered	Individual, plural, creative readings

The subject

Postmodernism announces not only the death of the author but also the death of the subject. The postmodern person is an evanascent "onion," a multi-layered social, cultural, linguistic and conflicted construct without any kind of singular, stable identity. Once the layers of constructed humanity are peeled away, nothing remains. A frightening prospect indeed! Nevertheless, the result is the leveling of subject and object on the plain of equality, the elimination of the subject/object distinction, and a resultant form of fieldwork and ethnography that destroys and "us/them" dynamic, entails relationships of reciprocity, engenders a multiplicity of significant voices, and results in the loss of Western anthropological authority.

Category	PM Perspective	Anthropological Implications
The subject	Dead	-Equality of persons -Elimination of the subject/object distinction -Reciprocity of relationships -Mutuality ofdiscourse and authority -Loss of authority of Western anthropol.

Truth and theory

The notion of universal, objective truth was the quintessential modernist conception. But in postmodernism, truth, like the author and subject, is dead, a death resulting from the negation of reality and the anemia of language. Like truth, theory has gone the way of all modernist flesh as an delimiting, dominating enterprise. Postmodern anthropologists can no longer concern themselves with the quest to discover cultural truth (laws, regularities) nor will they seek to form or reform any theories of culture. Instead, they will occupy themselves with an intense examination of the *quotidian* life and micronarratives of an indigenous people and engage reflectively in new forms of ethnographic discourse creation and analysis.

Category	PM Perspective	Anthropological Implications
Truth	Denied/negated	No quest for cultural truth, laws, patterns
Theory	Denied/negated	No forming or reforming of culture theories
		Exploration of the quotidian and micro-narrativity
		Focus on ethnographic discourse production and analysis

Representation

Representation, the re-presenting of one person, place, thing, event, language, etc., by other persons, places, things, events, language, etc. is a modernist notion that has also been rejected by postmodernists for numerous reasons (most notably the insufficiency of language to re-present external reality or

the world). The demise of this concept could spell the end of anthropology as it has been known, since doubt about the process of representation prevents the ethnographic description and cross-comparison of cultures which has been the traditional task of anthropology. Again, the only recourse is to discourse, for if reality cannot be described, then the only thing that can be described is the language that cannot describe reality. All social analysis, then, is undertaken from within the context of language. At best, according to Stephen Tyler, ethnography can "evoke" or "call to mind" cultural phenomena, but it cannot describe it.

Category	PM Perspective	Anthropological Implications
Representation	Denied/negated	Eliminates traditional ethnography and cross-cultural comparative analysis
		Social analysis takes place within language, and creates an genre that seeks to evoke and call cultural phenomena to mind

Metaphysics, epistemology, and methodology

Postmodern metaphysics denies ultimate reality and its knowability, and suggests that what is called reality are really mental, paradigmatic, or linguistic creations. One creative metaphysical alternative for postmodernism is chaos theory. Chaologists suggest that chaos theory undermines traditional epistemological presuppositions about the uniformity of nature, and proposes that physical evidence for indeterminacy best serves the intended model for postmodern social science. Postmodern epistemology denies causality, predictability, objectivity, rationality, and substitutes in their place a radical skepticism, relativism, intuitive interpretation and intertextuality. Through this maneuver, modern scientific methods are undermined, leaving the social sciences and anthropology to seek new grounds for being, again primarily in discourse. Deconstructionism as a method seeks to dismantle texts in such a way that the assumptions upon which they are built, the ambiguity of their language, and the political purposes for which they were composed are all exposed. While this methodology has enable anthropology to be more rhetorically and politically self-conscious, it has also been used to tear apart the most treasured methods, texts, and goals of the discipline.

Category	PM Perspective	Anthropological Implications
METAPHYSICS:		
Reality	Denied/negated	Agnostic about ultimate reality
	Constructed mentally paradigmatically, linguistically	Such constructs become the object of ethnography
Chaos theory	Offers a postmodern	Undermines traditional epistemology

Category	PM Perspective	Anthropological Implications
	metaphysic	Provides new basis for social science
EPISTEMOLOGY:		
Causality	Denied	Loss of scientific base of operation
Predictability Denied		
Objectivity	Denied	
Rationality	Denied	

Category	PM Perspective	Anthropological Implications
EPISTEMOLOGY: (con't)		
Relativism	Affirmed	Production of science(tist) fiction
Intertextuality	Affirmed	
METHODOLOGY:		
Intuitive hermen.	Individualized, relative	Solipisism, confusion
Deconstruction	Dismantles "texts"	Political and rhetorical self-consciousness
		Undoing of basic anthropology

With this summary of essential postmodern conceptions (denials) in mind, the final aspect of this paper will need to be a brief critique of postmodernism in both its positive and negative aspects.

CRITIQUE

Postmodern anthropology is anthropology based on postmodernism. To critique it, we need to criticize the foundation on which it is based. Hence, these critical remarks will focus on postmodernism itself rather than upon specific issues within postmodern anthropology. First I will offer a few positive statements of evaluation and then turn to a negative assessment.

Positive contributions

These are thoughts at large and are not presented in any order of importance. First of all, postmodernism has helped us to see the foibles of modernism and its agenda. Though modernism has made enormous contributions, it also has a down side to say the least and postmodernism has profitably pointed these out (e.g., excessively scientific, imperialistic, exclusionary, promethean, etc.).

Second, through the method of deconstructionism, postmodernism has made us more politically and rhetorically conscious. Understanding more about what texts say, how and upon what base texts are constructed, and for what real purpose they are deployed (politically, academically or otherwise) has been a benefit of postmodern analysis.

Third, postmodernism has emphasized in a fine post-positivist way the paradigmatic and pre-suppositional nature of all knowledge, thought, reason, interpretation, science, speech, etc. The sum-total of human experience takes place within a context and how reality contexts are constructed and how they affect us and our living out the *quotidian* are commendable postmodern contributions.

Fourth, postmodernism raises to consciousness and challenges the most sublime themes of human life and experience. These include the author, text, reader complex, the nature and identity of the human subject or person, the nature and role of truth and theory, the concept of representation, fundamental metaphysical, epistemological and methodological assumptions like reality, causality, predictability, rationality, objectivity, and hermeneutics. The challenges postmodernism has brought to our understanding of these matters has been provocative and enlightening.

To highlight just one of these "big questions," postmodernism forces us to question the nature of human subjects in a way that has not been done since the onset of the modernist paradigm. Are human beings as promethean as modernism has made him/her/us out to be? Postmodernism would seem to say that men and women are puny, not powerful. There is simply nothing to us onions, only layers of constructed meanings, language centers, and that's about it. And when we are gone, we're gone.

The postmodern conception of persons approximates one understanding of the human subject presented in Bible where s/he is described by the Hebrew term "*'enôsh* " which possibly derives from a root word meaning "to be weak or sick." In most of its biblical usages, *enôsh* suggests the frailty, vulnerability, finitude and insignificance of human subjects, especially in relation to God:

"What is man ('*enôsh*), that Thou dost take thought of him?
And the son of man ('*enôsh*) that Thou dost care for him?
Psalm 8: 4

As for man ('*enôsh*), his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
When the wind has passed over it, it is no more;
And its place acknowledges it no longer.
Psalm 103: 15-16

The biblical model in no way denigrates weak and feeble humankind to the point of nihilism the way postmodernism does. (The biblical emphasis on weakness is simply designed to show humans their need for God). Nevertheless, the postmodern critique of modern man, I think, is a needed corrective. We have lived with the image of Michaelangelo's titanic statue of *David* for too long; despite our science, reason, technology, and accumulated power, we are not as mighty as that statue's oversized hands and other features would symbolically suggest; we need to be humbled, and that, it seems to me, is exactly what postmodernism has done.

But, postmodernism overargues its case. It goes too far, way too far in its critique of modernism, and in its extremity, it reduces to a mass of contradictions that are impossible to reconcile. Let me explain why.

Negative assessment

Postmodernism, in the final analysis, is self-defeating, self-stultifying, self-imploding. In summary fashion, I think the problem is this: that in its attempt to deconstruct the foundational premises and propositions of modernism, it employs modernism and the very premises and propositions it seeks to destroy. This suggests to me that many of the premises and propositions of modernism are enduring, and that rather than seek to totally deconstruct them, a better course would be to reconstruct or rehabilitate them. Anyway, here are some examples of postmodernism's *tour de force* of the contradiction.

1. Postmodernism repudiates all overarching meta-narratives or master codes, but surely postmodernism itself is a mega-meta-narrative, a master of master codes.
2. Postmodernism denies truth, but surely all postmodern discourse is presented as truth nevertheless.
3. Postmodernism denies reality, but presents itself as the ultimate position on reality.
4. Postmodernism denies objectivity and affirms relativity, but would argue vehemently for the absolute objectivity and truthfulness for the postmodern paradigm (I think I got all the preceeding critiques in this one).
5. Postmodernism pronounces the death of the author, and denies his or her authority; but postmodern authors write living texts and expect to be heard and understood as authorities.
6. Postmodernism empowers readers to rewrite texts and to understand them in a plurality of ways; but would postmodern authors want **their** texts rewritten and understood in ways they did not intend?
7. Postmodernism pronounces the human subject to be dead; do postmodernists really believe this and practice this?
8. Postmodernists deny reality and access to reality, but it would seem to me they believe they have the last *word* on it (pun intended!).
9. Postmodernists deny truth, but present postmodernism as true; they deny theory, but postmodernism is a grand theory if there ever was one.
10. Postmodernism denies representation, but when postmodernists write and speak, they write and speak so as to *represent* postmodern reality.
11. Postmodernists suggest that all understandings of all reality are mentally, paradigmatically or linguistically constructed. But it would seem that postmodernists do not present postmodernism reality as being mentally, paradigmatically or linguistically constructed; it seems they would claim an exemption for their view on the constructed nature of reality.
12. Do not postmodernists who deny science nevertheless enjoy its benefits? Do not postmodernists who deny causality and rationality order their lives everyday (in the *quotidian*) by these principles?

13. Postmodernists who deny rationality write lengthy rational treatises (even if they do play with words and with form) which they expect to be read rationally. How come?
14. Postmodernists who say that all interpretations are personal, plural, and relative seem to present their own interpretation of things as public, singular, and objective. Again why and how?
15. The deconstructionist method used to dismantle the modern West and to show its imperialistic and political ways could and perhaps should be deployed to deconstruct deconstructionists and to ascertain what imperialistic and political agendas postmodernism itself seeks to propogate.

Well, enough is enough. Each of these criticism could be expanded, but I am sure the reader will get the point: postmodernism in its critique of modernism is self-defeating and its unavoidable use of modernist principles would tend to actually verify them. But what does postmodernism have to teach us at an even broader level? Let me end with one final thought.

CONCLUSION

I remember a humorous line from one of Woody Allen's movies that went something like this.

> "Mankind is at a crossroads. He faces two alternatives. On the one hand there is deep pessimism and dark despair. On the other hand there is mass destruction and hopeless annihilation. Let us pray for the wisdom to know the difference and to choose wisely."

Neither of Woody's alternatives seem particularly attractive. And neither have the options presented to us in the history of Western civilization. Premodernism was unacceptable to the architects of modernism, and modernism seems to be unacceptable to the architects of postmodernism. Chances are postmodernism will be rejected by the post-postmodernists. So where do we turn? Mankind is at a crossroads; but what are the alternatives, now? It seems in Woody-esque fashion, our choices are between nihilism and nihilism, and I think postmodernism has pointed this out. But maybe the "answer" does not lie in this world at all, but in the transcendent dimension. As C. S. Lewis once suggested (Lewis 1968: 25).

> If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.[16]

Let us pray for the wisdom to know the difference and to choose wisely.

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[16] Daniel Bell has argued that the modern agenda is as unacceptable as the postmodern agenda. All that is modern is exhausted and postmodernism is a dead-end. The alternative, he avers, is to return to traditional religion. See his *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society; The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism.*

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*Note: this bibliography contains works that I personally read and consulted and also cites works quoted by other works.

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