
VICTOR TURNER (1920-1983), SYMBOLIC ANTHROPOLOGY
Max Gluckman (1911-1975)

- Research on tribes of Central and South America (1936-1947)
- Manchester U.
- Openly anti-colonial
- Against racism
- Politics, Law & Ritual
- Judicial Processes among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia
Claude Levi-Strauss’ Structuralism
Arnold van Gennep
Rites de passage
Ndembu ritual symbols

- A chinjikijilu is a land mark or blaze
- Derived from kujikijila, to blaze a trail by cutting marks on trees
- A blaze connects the known with the unknown territory; it marks the way
- It also allows the hunter to re-connect back to his village from the unexplored and unknown bush
- Myth of the labyrinth ("string" for Theseus)
From Structuralist to Mystic to Symbologist to Liminality Theorist to Political Anthropologist!

- Victor Turner’s intellectual quest led him from a Structuralist viewpoint through a series of major ideas.
- The idea of “the liminoid” (the in-between, the no-man’s land) is one he is often associated with (a “liminality theorist”).
- His early Structuralism is both in terms of Durkheimian social facts and Freudian psychological facts.
The Liminal Phenomenon

- Turner studied the liminal state in rites of passage in his earlier work
- He borrowed the key idea from Arnold van Gennep, a Belgian anthropologist
- But he extended the concept to cover the basic condition of modern, industrial capitalist societies and “post-industrial,” “post-industrial,” “information age societies
- Religious rituals “embody” and give visible form to liminoid aspects of our subjective lives
- He did not immediately associate with semiotics
Comparative Symbology or Semiotics?

- Victor Turner used ideas as “idea units” and did not attempt to incorporate his theoretical formulations into broader paradigms or theory systems.
- His comparative work on symbols is largely Cartesian in that he thinks in terms of a dialectic of structure and anti-structure.
- Objects in a museum are seen as giving visible form to cultural phenomena like ritual.
Carl Gustav Jung’s Archetypes: Universal Symbols
Avalokiteshvara: bodhisattva of compassion
But are these Symbols in a Cartesian or a Peircian Sense?
Kinship and Structure: Generations & Ritual
Ndembu Funeral Rituals & Japanese Funeral Rituals
Field Work in Northern Rhodesia = Zambia; but, he extends the ideas to modern societies
- Ritual symbols
- Interpretation of exegetical meaning
- Indigenous informants
- Operational meaning
- Gestalt of meanings (whole, “totality”)
- Comparative symbology
- “Communitas” (tt) = rudimentary structures in a society during a liminal period, leisure genres like entertainment in mass societies
“Social Dramas” (tt)

- Not the same as Erving Goffman’s “dramaturgical sociology” (SI Pr)
- Schism and conflict is played out in mini-social dramas and major social dramas
- Dis-harmony, aharmonic processes
- Similar to sociological Conflict Theory
- Conflict resolution occurs when “redressive action” stops the further spread of conflict (e.g. mediation, ritual)
Is Turner’s Approach Semiotic?

- Turner’s symbolic anthropology is not necessarily compatible with Peirce’s semiotic approach.

- It is interesting to consider this because it seems to be so similar. After all, he deals with symbols and culture.

- The main difference is a Cartesian approach to the subject (anthropologist) versus a Peircian approach that involves Interpretive Networks and Operationalized Representations.