Introduction
Echoes of a conversation

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What is this book?

This book provides an overview of important currents of thought in social and cultural anthropology from the 19th century to the present. It offers a broad introduction to key theoretical schools and styles of this extended period. It gives some sense of their historical context and their interconnections and points of overlap. The primary focus is on developments in British, and to a lesser extent, American and French anthropological traditions, although the chapters also demonstrate the progressive interweaving of these traditions over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries. It will introduce readers to a fascinating and exciting kaleidoscope of ideas that have transformed the humanities and social sciences, and the way we all understand ourselves and the societies we live in today. The theories examined in these pages engage with some of the most fundamental questions anthropologists continue to ask today: What, if any, sort of freedom do human beings have? How can we explain and understand the regularities and the patterned nature of our collective lives? What is culture and what is society? What can our bodies, our minds and our technologies do, and what happens in their interaction? What are the sources, meanings and effects of the differences – in terms of identity, perspective or power – that run between and within human collectives? Is there a place for the study of non-humans in anthropology?

The chapters in this book track a longstanding core lecture series given at Cambridge University for social anthropology students, entitled 'Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory'. While the lecture series is primarily aimed at undergraduates, it is attended by Masters students, and is often also audited by doctoral students. The aim of the lecture series is to provide a broad, accessible yet relatively sophisticated introduction to anthropological theory, and this is also the main aim of this book.

This book engages with the classic anthropological 'isms' (evolutionism, diffusionism, functionalism, structural-functionalism, structuralism, transactionalism, neo-Marxism, interpretivism, feminism, postcolonialism), frequently identified theories and theoretical schools (the Frankfurt School, the Manchester School, practice theory, actor-network theory), classic and more recent moments of theoretical rupture (the 'writing culture' moment, the ontological turn), and more diffuse reflections around particular conceptual problems such as the problem of historical thinking in anthropology (see chapter 5), the question of the extension and boundaries of fieldsites (see chapter 6) and the distinctive dynamics of the shaping and reshaping of anthropological concepts (see chapter 15). All of the above are treated here, albeit not all at chapter length or in the form of self-contained

sketches. A number of chapters weave together accounts of shifts, tensions and transformations between two or more of the above, and some chapters return to the same school or style from different perspectives; most notably, for instance, postcolonial critiques in anthropology are evoked in chapters 1, 5, 6 and 12, rather than being subsumed in a single chapter. I will return to the organisation of the book and the chapters below.

While 'schools and styles' are its primary organising device, however, this book is not simply a list of theories. It is also a collective reflection on what anthropological theory is and how it changes. The authors in this book propose different explicit and implicit answers to that question. In this and in other ways, this book is best thought of as a conversation – at times an argument – rather than a single narrative.

The section 'Views from Cambridge?' gives some more background on the origin of this book and reflects on the particular kind of perspective on theory that is implied by a book based on a lecture course in one particular department. The four sections after this delve into more fundamental questions concerning what theory is and how to think about it. Along the way they elucidate some of the organisation of this book. Before we begin, however, one very general question needs to be answered especially – but not only – with undergraduate readers of this book in mind: Why bother engaging with the history of anthropological theory at all?

On learning to see theory

In some students, the very thought of a 'theory course' or a book based on such a course, will induce despondency or terror. Partly under the influence of increasing modularity in undergraduate teaching and with an attentive eye to students as customers whose tastes must be catered for, anthropological courses and introductions to anthropology have tended to veer towards catchy topics and titles. Sex and death, mystery and inequality, the strangest practices made familiar and your unexamined everyday life made strange: anthropology provides all of this in droves, and this is often where students are invited to begin. Theory, by contrast, seems tedious, lifeless and irrelevant; old theories even more so. Theory also seems, by contrast to those catchy topics and cases, essentially *difficult*.

Theory, this book will demonstrate, is none of these things. And this is true, crucially, because 'theory' is not a single, free-standing thing at all. Theories come in many shapes and sizes, and in anthropology at least, they are always intimately interwoven with practice and with particulars. Theory is already there, at the heart of the more immediately attractive or relevant-seeming arguments and cases with which students first encounter anthropology. Like Molière's character Monsieur Jourdain, who was surprised to be told that he had all his life been speaking in prose, readers of this book will swiftly realise that they have been doing theory all along.

Of course, this observation could lead to rendering theory meaningless in a different way. As I describe below, some recent schools of thought in anthropology and beyond would seek to do away with 'theory' altogether as a distinct topic. This book, by contrast, proposes that theory, as a distinct focus of study, still has an important role to play. Focusing on theory allows one to make explicit the conceptual issues that structure and underlie anthropological discussions and debates, and to see how these have shifted and changed through time. This overview of debates empowers newcomers to anthropology – and indeed seasoned anthropologists engaging upon a new topic or field of research – by allowing them to situate the works they encounter within a broader historical and

discursive landscape. Learning to recognise the distinctive clues that suggest an author is writing in a particular school or style of thinking means learning to see their accounts, descriptions and cases as *arguments*, rather than simply statements of fact or articles of faith. It will be invaluable in helping students to critically detect assumptions, blind spots and shortcuts in the texts they read. But this work is not entirely negative. The critical exercise of detecting theoretical assumptions is just one of the skills that comes with a thorough knowledge of the history of theory. Another is that of imagining how, and to what effect, two radically different theoretical perspectives might apply to the same body of material. This, in turn, is the first step in learning to build one's own distinctive theoretical arguments.

There is a broader point here concerning the use of theory, and the use of this book, for the attention not only of newcomers to anthropology, but also for graduate students or indeed professional anthropologists embarking upon an original research project. A handful of the theories engaged in this book are lively contemporary positions that anthropologists writing today might explicitly espouse. The majority, however, are usually understood as belonging to history rather than to present debate. The most common reason such 'old theories' are usually invoked in anthropology is as a catalogue of errors, a list of conceptual shortcuts that we wish to avoid repeating. This is not in itself a bad reason to recall them. In particular, it is often possible with hindsight to build a historical context around theories that the actors themselves may not have seen, or seen too well – either way – that they would not themselves have considered as 'context' (see chapter 1). This in turn can provide powerful lessons for the present, in the form of errors and short-cuts to avoid. Important as it is, however, this cannot be the only reason for retrospection, or the only mode in which it occurs. Old theories can also be mined for new insights, particularly if we recognise those aspects of their problematics that still resonate.

Views from Cambridge?

This book is a collective endeavour of a somewhat unusual kind. Most edited books are the result of conferences or workshops. They represent a conversation that took place at one point in time over a few days. Encyclopaedias, including thematic ones, by contrast, are assembled by commissioning articles from scholars in a range of institutions, who have often not been in conversation at all. They seek to provide a comprehensive coverage of a discipline or subject area.

This book, by contrast, is the result of a much longer conversation. As its origin as a lecture series determines much about the form, content and 'voice' of the book, it is worth saying a few words about how a lecture series, and this one in particular, is organised in Cambridge. The 'Schools and Styles' lecture series has been running under this title for many decades along the same basic principle: lecturers and associates of the department of social anthropology are each called upon to give one or two lectures on a theoretical school, style or problem in which they have a particular interest or expertise. The selection is made by a paper coordinator, whose role is to ensure the balanced and comprehensive nature of the set as a whole. This oversight is, however, collective as well as individual: the core teaching staff of the department come together to discuss the content of every lecture series once a year. Coordinators present their proposed papers for the following years to the scrutiny of their colleagues, who will often comment on particular inclusions and exclusions. The department comes together in the same way to set examination papers, at which point again the balance of topics and the way in which they are treated

is examined collectively. As a result of this process, the lecture series, and therefore this book, is a thoroughly collective endeavour. It represents an ongoing conversation between a group of colleagues with diverse interests about the history and state of anthropological theory. This – crucially – includes colleagues who are not represented as authors here, but who have been involved formally and informally in these conversations over the years.[1]

This conversation is longstanding but it is also perpetually changing. The chapters in this book reflect a moment: they are based on the lectures as given in the 2016 to 2017 academic year. As the personnel of the department changes and their interests shift, so does the content of the lectures, the theoretical schools they choose to lecture on, the overall outline of the course and, more broadly, the way in which 'theory' itself is por-trayed and understood – more on this later. Individual and collective perspectives about what such a course should contain shift through time, tracking transformations in anthro-pological theory, and transformations in the Cambridge department. Some topics are enduring: I was lectured on structural-functionalism as an undergraduate nearly 20 years ago; I now give that lecture, which forms the basis of chapter 1 in this book. Needless to say, it is no longer the same lecture as the one that I once attended. As the same topic is taken up by different people, each rewrites the lectures more or less from scratch, some-times drawing on the reading lists of their predecessors. Other topics represented here are new: chapter 9 on the Frankfurt School is based on a lecture given for the first time in the 2016 to 2017 academic year.

In sum, then, this book does not claim to be either exhaustive or representative of anthropological theory as a whole. As we shall see below, any such claim would be inher-ently meaningless. Like any other account of theory, this is an account from a particular time and place, and I have tried in the above to give a sense of where and when that is. This book is the result of the complex process through which a collective of scholars in an academic department put together a partly shared perspective on anthropological theory.

However, the sense in which this book gives a 'Cambridge perspective' on theory should be understood under the caveat that any such perspective is internally multiple and historically changing. Seen from outside, university departments are often caricatured as holding a particular line or representing a particular style, in an endless process of self-reproduction. Yet the briefest consideration of a university department's actual structure as a community of practice should demonstrate how unlikely this is to be the case. Some of the contributors in this book were trained in Cambridge and others were not. Some have been lecturing there for many years. Others joined the department much more recently. A number will be employed elsewhere by the time of publication. Thus, the reader should not be surprised to find radical differences in tone, style and approach between the chapters in this book. This book is the echo of a conversation that took place in Cambridge. It is not 'the Cambridge view', as there is no such thing.

What is theory?

As I noted above, contributors' views are diverse not only in their approach to particular theories, but in the more fundamental question of what 'theory' is. This book as a whole is best treated as a collective and multi-vocal answer to this question. It cannot be summed up in a few pithy lines. The rest of this introduction will, however, outline three longstanding

threads to the general discussion about the nature of theory that runs through this book. The first concerns the 'external' problem: how, and to what effect, does one mark out theory from other things (method, data, practice, etc.) often subsumed in anthropology through a distinction between theory and ethnography? The second concerns the 'internal' question of how theory is subdivided (into schools, styles, paradigms, concepts, etc.). The third question asks what, if anything, is distinctively anthropological about anthropological theory.

These questions point to three demarcations that organise, in part, the subject matter and approach of this book: the theory/ethnography distinction, the device of grouping theory into 'paradigms' and indeed the device of treating anthropological theory as distinctive. None of these is self-evident, and this book, while relying on them to some extent, does not take them for granted. However, I will argue that all three of these conceptual devices can be and have been extremely productive tools for thinking, even though they are not philosophically tenable in some broader senses.

What, if anything, separates 'theory' from anything else? In particular, lines are often drawn between theory and method, on the one hand, and between theory and material (content, data, description, examples) on the other. For a substantial period in the history of anthropology (and in some quarters still today), theory was understood to stand apart from, and above, method and material. Fieldwork pointed to both of the latter terms: a technical procedure for gathering 'data' that would then be analysed and theorised. This speaks to the enduring division in anthropology between 'ethnography' (both in the sense of a fieldwork method, and in the sense of a written product) and 'theory'. This distinction draws on, and echoes, within our discipline, epistemological distinctions widespread throughout social science and indeed science more broadly: distinctions between description and explanation; and between the particular and the general. For evolutionists, some structural-functionalists such as Radcliffe-Brown (see chapter 1) and some structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss (see chapter 2), this conceptual division was also a division of labour: fieldworkers on the one hand, theorists on the other, had different roles and skillsets that would be found in the same person only coincidentally. To the fieldworker fell the task of accurately describing the way of life and customs of a people. To the theorist the – implicitly nobler – task of comparing, abstracting and generalising from this data in view of a theory. Even though the professional culture of anthropologists since the beginning of the 20th century mostly enjoined them to take on both of these roles, the sense in which these roles are distinct along the lines described above endures in backroom talk about one's own particular strengths and weaknesses in comparison with other anthropologists ('He's a fantastic ethnographer, but not much of a theorist', etc.).

Needless to say, these distinctions in anthropology between theory and method, and also between theory and data, are inherently political in more than one sense. They map the internal politics of the discipline, with its various implicit and explicit scales of value and accreditation. But they emerge also from anthropology's historical place in a global order of knowledge production in which metropolitan scholars theorised about data extracted from the colonies and the peripheries (see chapters 1 and 5). This reflects the broader point that, for much of the history of anthropology, as pithily summarised by Clifford Geertz: 'its subjects and its audience were not only separable but morally disconnected, that the first were to be described but not addressed, the second informed but not implicated' (1988: 132). 'Theory' played the role of a filter, through which anthropologists performed that miracle of one-way translation. As Chua and Mathur (forthcoming)

recently noted, anthropologists' still-frequent reference to an 'us' position remains an enduring instance of this unequal global order of knowledge production. Anthropologists have frequently deconstructed the idea that there might be a culturally homogeneous (Western or EuroAmerican) 'us' to whom anthropology might be addressed. But an equally problematic implication is that of the univocality of anthropology as a discipline. That anthropological 'us' masks an unequal global academic landscape in which (new, exciting, cutting-edge) 'theory' is still looked for in the same old metropolitan centres. In this order of things, 'theory from the South' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012) or 'from the East' (Howe and Boyer 2015) has been seen as requiring specific and explicit acknowledgement. A number of chapters in this book explore the way in which Marxist, feminist, post-colonial and other critical scholars have seen themselves as challenging the politics of anthropological knowledge production (see chapters 1, 5, 6, 8 and 12). In so doing, they have not only produced theory themselves, but also explored the politics of doing so. Of course, their own way with theory, and their own politics of knowledge production, have in turn become the subject of further critiques.

And yet, from another point of view, these critiques were merely reformulating a very old point embedded in the disciplinary structure of anthropology itself. Indeed, the birth of anthropology as a discipline coincided precisely with a challenge to the classic way of dividing theory from method on the one hand, theory from material on the other. With Malinowski's focus on long-term fieldwork came the recognition that questions of field method were inherently theoretical. Malinowskian functionalism was as much a methodological development as a theoretical one: new kinds of 'data' and new understandings of what 'data' might be, made old theoretical questions meaningless (see chapter 1). The point that ethnographic method is an inherently theoretical question has been a recurrent theme in anthropological discourse ever since; as Harri Englund shows in his discussion of the Manchester School's 'extended-case method', and the more recent development of 'multi-sited fieldwork' (see chapter 6). In a different vein, Bourdieu's moves towards a 'theory of practice', however highly theoretical they themselves ended up being, were premised on an explicit challenge to the usual way in which theory had been abstracted from descriptions of the flow of life (see chapter 4).

There was also another way in which anthropological scholarship, from the beginning, involved a challenge to the usual way of imagining the theory/method distinction. This was the profound sense in which the conceptual work of anthropology, from the early 20th century, if not indeed before, was intended as inherently disruptive and critical, challenging Western assumptions and established philosophical paradigms by showing the rationality of unfamiliar modes of thinking or the effectiveness and beauty of unfamiliar social arrangements. This was closely linked to Malinowski's challenge to the 'division of labour' model of anthropological research: fieldworkers, in the Malinowskian view, *had* to be theorists, and theorists *had* to be fieldworkers, because the engine of anthropological knowledge production was the experience of otherness in the course of field study (Kuper 1973: 32–33). Making 'defamiliarisation' into the core anthropological move meant, in turn, that successful fieldwork had to be transformative, if not indeed destructive of established theory, and creative of new theoretical perspectives.

That Malinowskian view has not gone unchallenged, and the nature of fieldwork has changed profoundly also over the past century (see chapter 6). But this view of fieldwork as transformative persists in contemporary anthropological attitudes to the ethnography–theory relation. In other, more self-consciously scientific disciplines, excitement and

success tends to be attached to research that confirms clearly set out hypotheses, whereas – an often deplored fact – 'negative results' are rarely even published (see Granqvist 2015). In anthropology, by contrast, fieldwork has usually been seen as successful precisely at the moment when it proved unexpected, and exceeded theory. The role of fieldwork was in effect to produce that moment when the theoretical frames with which one had initially approached the problem revealed themselves to be inadequate. This model of anthropology as perpetual conceptual revolution has remained deeply anchored in anthropologists' ways of evaluating each other and themselves, even though this is not, of course, all that anthropologists do.[2]

One of the effects of this model is a particularly frequent fragmentation of theoretical perspectives, with each subsequent fieldworker feeling the need to break with a previous theoretical status quo. Hence the multiplicity of schools, styles, labels and 'turns' with which this introduction began. As much as a new 'framework', what is often at stake in these changes and shifts is a different set of cases and experiences. That is why so many of the chapters in this book are, in effect, as much a history of paradigmatic ethnographies as a history of theories.

Another effect of this model of permanent conceptual revolution is that anthropology, from the start, posed the question of the encounter with others' theories, long before 'theory from the South' was formulated as a problem in those terms. Certainly, there was always a positivistically inclined strand of anthropology that gave non-Western theories relatively short shrift. They featured mainly as elements of a factual reality to be explained by our own, definitionally superior, theories. But another, interpretive, vein that also ran through anthropology from the start of the discipline (see chapters 1 and 8) asked how another point of view on the world might transform, inform or challenge our own. This question, ever reinvented, took a more radical form with the 'writing-culture' critique of the 1980s, when anthropologists' own knowledge practices, modes of explanation and techniques of authorship came under more direct scrutiny (see chapter 8). Anthropologists' claim to be able to explain, organise and translate a diversity of cultural points of view was critically examined. An authoritative anthropological interpretation of others' perspectives was more clearly distinguished from a commitment to actually letting those others speak in their own voice. This being said, detractors noted that the 1980s critique itself was animated as much by resolutely 'metropolitan' high theory imported from literary studies and philosophy as by the actual transformative encounter with the voices of 'the other', and indeed often in practice led to a focus on the writing, rather than the doing, of ethnography (Handelman 1994).

A further (ontological) turn of that (epistemological) screw followed the observation that anthropologists' concern with the study of 'cultures' or points of view on the world carried an implicit imbalance that undermined its own relativist message (see chapter 14). With cultural relativism, everyone was entitled to their viewpoints, of course. But 'the world', or 'nature', remained out of the anthropological frame; a matter for biologists, physicists and the like. In other words, everyone had their culture, but the West, as it happened, also had the key to nature. The 'ontological turn' that emerged as a critique of that position is only the most recent (albeit perhaps the most radical) instance of the idea that anthropology's role is to provide conceptual disturbance to Western theories by taking non-Western ones seriously.

This ontological move chimed in with other developments at the turn of the 21st century, such as actor–network theory (see chapter 13), in attacking the very figure of theory itself.

Both of these schools (for that is what they have now become) come with the strong, explicit claim that they are not 'theories', in the sense of overarching systematic accounts of the world to be infirmed or confirmed through empirical study, but something else: conceptual techniques, recipes for innovation; in one word: heuristics (see chapter 14; Abbott 2004; Candea 2016). This appeal to heuristics has three main characteristics: it embraces fragmentariness and multiplicity (positions, concepts, arguments are not supposed to build up into an overarching scheme); it eschews repetition (there is no 'framework' to apply from one study to the next, only methodological principles for producing novelty each time); it presents itself as performative, a mode of doing rather than saying (each account is a practical or political intervention into the world, rather than a mere description of the world). While this turn to heuristics resolves many key issues relating to the definition of 'theory' (not least the question, examined in this section, of the distinction between theory and method, or theory and material), it brings with it its own inherent difficulties, as chapter 13 and especially chapter 14 point out.

In other words, the key difficulty in writing about theory today, in the way this book seeks to do, lies primarily in the fact that the schools and styles examined here are not simply different views on the world, they also imply different − sometimes radically different − visions of what theory is. To write about the history of theory is thus to write about a constantly changing object. In other words, this book is not just a conversation about the nature of theory: it is an account of, but also a contribution to, a longstanding anthropological conversation on that subject.

This way of seeing things gives us a better sense of what the object of this book is: not 'theory' *per se* as a clearly defined thing out there, but rather the problem of theory as a focus of debate and concern in the history of anthropology. Seen like this, there are powerful reasons to resist the dissolution of theory as a category. Dissolving the distinction between theory and ethnography is in many ways an attractive move, as is the recurrent and always popular move of sweeping away 'old dualisms'. And yet that move does tend to miss the point that 'dualisms', while not always philosophically tenable, have their pragmatic and conceptual uses. Throughout all of the debates briefly outlined above, the constantly reimagined, always unstable, and in many ways clearly fictional distinction between 'ethnography' and 'theory' has been put to constant work. Of course, this caveat is not incompatible with a heuristic view; quite the opposite: it points precisely to what the theory/ethnography distinction ought to be seen as; namely, a heuristic. For all its faults and limitations, the distinction between theory and ethnography has provided anthropology with an ever-renewed heuristic engine (Strathern 2011; Heywood forthcoming).

Strengths and weaknesses of the '-isms'

My invocation above on the vision of radically opposed schools and styles leads us straight to the second line of questioning that runs through this book, which concerns the internal subdivision of theory: What is it made of? The heuristic turn I have just described was in part a reaction against the classic narrative device of subdividing 'theory' into lumps − schools, theories or 'paradigms' − the '-isms' for short. That vision is so familiar as to have become common sense. Each '-ism' comes packaged with its leading figures, its internal dissenters, its key works, its historical moment, its classic questions, its characteristic type of data and forms of argument, its standard failures and critiques. It comes, in other words, with − as in that unavoidable undergraduate essay title − its 'strengths and weaknesses'.

As I noted at the outset, and as its title suggests, this book – and the lecture series it is based on – espouses paradigms as part of its mode of exposition. It does not do so exclusively, however, nor does it do so uncritically. Mostly, when '–isms' are invoked in these pages, they are invoked with the limits of their definition kept firmly in view. This book is as much about the shifts between schools and styles, the overlaps and connections across them and the tensions within them, as it is an account of schools and styles themselves. Nevertheless, as with the theory/ethnography distinction, paradigmatic views of theory, however – necessarily – partial they may be, have an important job to do.

The narrative device of subdividing theory into '–isms' has been until recently so pervasive that one might miss the fact that it has a history. As late as the 1950s, an author such as Nadel could still imagine that a single theoretical perspective could provide *The Foundations of Social Anthropology* (1951). Nadel's rigorous and sophisticated book rises above (or perhaps delves below) any vision of competing 'schools' in order to lay out the basic principles for the anthropological observation and interpretation of human behaviour and institutions. In this and in other ways, Nadel was an outlier, as the narrative of changing theories and competing schools was born with modern anthropology itself. Two scholars classically invoked as anthropological founding figures – Boas in the USA and Malinowski in the UK – teased out their own theoretical position through repeated attacks against 'evolutionism' (typically the first '–ism' in histories of anthropological theory: see chapter 1). By the time Nadel wrote *Foundations*, 'functionalism', 'diffusionism' and 'structuralism' had joined evolutionism as commonplace labels. And yet, as Nadel's book testifies, it was still possible in 1951 to imagine a fundamental common ground underlying this diversity of approaches. The point was forcefully put by Radcliffe-Brown, as an explicit critique of Malinowski's statement that he had created a functionalist 'school':

> There is no place in natural science for 'schools' in this sense, and I regard social anthropology as a branch of natural science. Each scientist starts from the work of his predecessors, finds problems which he believes to be significant, and by observation and reasoning endeavours to make some contribution to a growing body of theory. Co-operation amongst scientists results from the fact that they are working on the same or related problems. Such co-operation does not result in the formation of schools, in the sense in which there are schools of philosophy or of painting. There is no place for orthodoxies and heterodoxies in science. Nothing is more pernicious in science than attempts to establish adherence to doctrines. All that a teacher can do is to assist the student in learning to understand and use the scientific method. It is not his business to make disciples.
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> (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 1)

The vision of a discipline divided into radically different 'paradigms' that swept away Nadel and Radcliffe-Brown's hope of shared principles, follows loosely the understanding of scientific knowledge production introduced by Thomas Kuhn (1970). Kuhn first applied the notion of paradigm to the study of science. It contrasts directly and explicitly with the commonplace vision of science articulated by Radcliffe-Brown above. Kuhn argued that scientists work not simply with a shared method, but rather necessarily 'within' paradigms: relatively coherent bodies of theories with their particular assumptions, techniques and questions. These are organised around a few key 'paradigmatic' works that set the scene of the thinkable for subsequent scholars. From time to time, a new work or experiment

ruptures the frame and a paradigm shift occurs. A new paradigm then emerges and from its new vantage point, as Ardener wrote of anthropological theory: 'for practical purposes textbooks that looked useful, no longer are; monographs that used to appear exhaustive now seem selective; interpretations which once looked full of insight now seem mechanical and lifeless' (Ardener 1971: 449, cited in Stocking 1984: 180).

With or without reference to Kuhn, this paradigmatic vision of theories as powerfully organising perspectives, 'within which' anthropologists of a particular time and place think and work, became for a while the key narrative device for recalling anthropological theory. The institutionalisation of this view within anthropology began with book-length reviews of subsequent theoretical perspectives on one particular topic, such as totemism (Lévi-Strauss 1963) and religion (Evans-Pritchard 1965) that could be seen as precursors for later accounts of '-isms' on the scale of anthropology as a whole (Kuper 1973; Layton 1997; Barnard 2000). Many of those classic overviews of anthropological theory are still staple general reading for theory courses today. They all present anthropological theory in the form of a sequence of paradigms, relatively small in number, that could be manageably treated by one author in a single-volume work.

This model is beginning to show signs of strain. For one thing, the sheer multiplication of '-isms', schools and turns over the past 30 or so years seems to have deterred scholars from following that example. Where recent developments could once be subsumed under 'postmodernism' (Barnard 2000: 158ff), the world of theory has moved on in such a frenzied way that postmodernism now seems a very long time ago. There now seem to be too many '-isms' to encompass in a single-authored book. In some respects, the encyclopaedia is taking over as a form from these classic overviews (Barnard and Spencer 1996; 2009). There, a multitude of schools and styles can be described through polished self-contained yet cross-referenced miniatures. Alternatively, authors have focused on accounts of particular bodies of theory such as feminism (Moore 1988) or actor–network theory (Latour 2005), or have experimented with telling the story of anthropological theory through a focus on one particular problematic such as the gift (Sykes 2005); approached theory through thematic readers (Moore and Sanders 2006); or, indeed, written collectively about the contemporary state of theory itself (Moore 2000; Boyer, Faubion and Marcus 2015). This multiplicity and fragmentation of approaches to theory marks the tension surrounding the '-isms' model as a narrative device for approaching anthropological theory.

Some may view the possible demise of the paradigmatic vision of anthropology with equanimity or even with relief. For, indeed, the limits of this narrative form are familiar (for a systematic critique of the idea that anthropology is made up of 'paradigms' in the Kuhnian sense, see Strathern 1987). The first set of concerns turns on what a paradigmatic view leaves out. This vision of anthropology as a sequence of '-isms' is inherently synchronic: it depicts multiple coherent theoretical viewpoints on the world, not unlike the 'cultures' described by interpretivist anthropologists (see chapter 8).[3] The most obvious problem with paradigms, and indeed with cultures, is that as soon as one looks closer, the neat list of self-contained perspectives dissolves into a cacophony of idiosyncratic viewpoints inhabited by particular people in particular contexts. The more clearly and coherently a paradigm is outlined, the harder it is to find it exemplified anywhere, except maybe in the programmatic writings of one or two key proponents. Imagining the history of theory as a sequence of paradigms tends to minimise both this internal diversity and the continuities and overlap between different paradigms; overlaps both conceptually and in

terms of personnel. This is a point that many of the chapters stress, even as they invoke the common '–isms' of anthropological theory.

Second, a paradigmatic vision also tends to comfort a narrative of permanent revolution, whose attractions for anthropologists we have mentioned above. With each paradigm shift, a grand rupture or *caesura* is imagined to sweep away all that came before it. This 'caesurist' view (Pina-Cabral 2010) eliminates any sense that anthropology might be a shared or indeed a cumulative endeavour. It also imagines paradigms as essentially cast-offs in a great march forward. The future is open, the past a series of errors. Indeed, those neatly self-contained paradigms are almost always identified and labelled in retrospect, their limitations and blind-spots standing out against our putatively superior vantage points. Hence that recurrent question by students on theory courses: 'If *they* were functionalists, structuralists, Marxists and so forth − what are *we* now?' There is no answer to that question because its premise is mistaken. Even when 'they' did invoke these terms, 'they' were not simply functionalist or structuralists, at least not in their own perspective, but rather, as 'we' are now: open-minded scholars seeking to understand and/or explain the world in the best way they could. It is usually in retrospect − and often somewhat unfairly − that we can see them as theory-bound and context-bound, just as others will no doubt see us. A paradigmatic vision forecloses the sense of open-endedness, excitement and conceptual experimentation that existed in earlier periods of anthropology as it does now. The effect has been evocatively described as one of 'ruination' of previous theoretical approaches (Navaro-Yashin 2009); for an insightful analysis of the dynamics of paradigm shifts and the elicitation of perpetual novelty in the social sciences, see Abbott (2001).

A third key issue with the paradigmatic view is that it implies that theories come as a finite list of similar entities. The paradigmatic view seems to suggest that one might agree on an exhaustive master list of 'what all the theories are'. But this is a mistake, for reasons already explored above. What counts as a theory, an '-ism', depends on one's perspective. At what point a group of scholars can usefully be lumped together as saying essentially the same thing depends on the scale on which one considers them, and indeed on the measure of distance one takes from their position.[4] The resulting list of paradigms is always perspectival, lumping together things that some would hold apart, or distributing across different paradigms positions and perspectives that others might wish to hold together as one. There is no exhaustive set of theories, any more than there could be a complete list of the world's cultures. Totality in that respect is a mirage. It is thus no use arguing, in the abstract, that this or that '-ism' is missing in this or any other account of anthropological theory. The real question is what if anything this absence *does*, and how it relates to what the work is setting out to do. On this point as a general principle for critiquing the 'gaps' in theories, see chapter 1.

These three objections are important to bear in mind. However, they are primarily objections to the way paradigms are invoked in the daily cut and thrust of anthropological argument. In laying out the novelty of their own approach, authors frequently cede to the temptation of sorting 'the literature' into self-contained boxes, carefully stacked to produce a clear and obvious 'blind spot' that their particular case, argument or approach will, of course, illuminate. There, the invocation of paradigms can serve as a convenient rhetorical device for ignoring complexity. As with the question of 'gaps', the problem is not 'neatness' per se, but rather the uses to which it is put. It is a great virtue of a paradigmatic view, to be able to background complexity in order to make certain key relationships and differences stand out. The worry is that, in the day-to-day arguments of anthropologists, such backgrounding can become erasure.

This problem is less common, however, in works such as this one, that focus retrospectively on anthropological theory *per se* and are not required to set out their own stand quite so boldly. In such works, paradigmatic accounts of anthropological theory rarely stand alone. In practice, they are usually interwoven with a more historical view that foregrounds precisely the complexities, changes, shifts, internal dissensions, and external continuities that are backgrounded in a strictly paradigmatic view. In other words, the paradigmatic and the historical views together form a heuristic pair throughout the classic overviews of anthropological theory evoked above, as indeed they do in many chapters in this book.

In sum, the core point here parallels the one raised for the theory/ethnography distinction. 'Schools and Styles' are not invoked in this book as a simple list of objects out there in the world. Rather, they serve as a heuristic – a way of thinking through changes and stabilities in anthropological theory and focusing in and out of broader cross-cutting theoretical problems. It is also important to remember that, however useful the paradigm/history pair may be as a device for making sense of history, very different devices and visions of theory are possible. These can productively bring other things into view. In chapter 15, for instance, Strathern proposes a way of tracking the shifting patterns of fields of concepts (in this case, concepts surrounding 'personhood') that does away with the need to rely on a paradigmatic account of the history of anthropology.

A roadmap

Some of the chapters in this book focus primarily on a single paradigm or thinker, albeit with considerations about the broader critical conversation within which they were embedded. Others focus on a contrast or transition between two or more schools of thought. Some eschew paradigms altogether, to focus on a particular theoretical problem. Consequently, many of the chapters track overlapping periods of time, or cut across time in different ways; there is no single way to order these into a chronological sequence. It is an important part of the spirit of this book, and of the lecture series it is based on, that beyond some very broad elements of chronology,[5] there is no settled year–on–year sequence in which overlapping schools are introduced. There is, therefore, no single narrative way through it. Various narratives about precursors and followers, about principal and secondary branchings in the history of theory, are possible, so the contributors to this book do not all tell that story in the same way. Students are expected to build their own picture of the history of theory through independently assembling the cross-referenced picture given to them in the lectures, and through their own independent reading and research. We hope readers of this book will use it in this spirit also.

A few very broad elements of sequencing, however, may serve to give a roadmap to the contents of the book. The book opens with an account of the birth of anthropological theory in the midst of a multi-stranded international debate around notions of evolution, diffusion and function. Theoretical schools that are in important ways distinct (19th-century evolutionism, the diffusionist and relativist anthropology of Franz Boas in the USA, the functionalism of Malinowski in the UK and Durkheim in France and the structural-functionalism spearheaded by Radcliffe-Brown) are here evoked together, to highlight the way in which their differences were forged through interaction. This uncharacteristically long chapter serves as a background to the rest of the book; many of the schools and styles examined in later chapters can be read as critical reactions to, transformations or reappropriations of elements drawn from this initial theoretical conversation.

The first of these departures is the focus of chapter 2: the structuralist thinking of Claude Lévi-Strauss. This broke with a central tenet shared by the various schools examined in chapter 1, namely that of the organic analogy – the notion that societies or cultures might be thought of as similar to biological organisms. Lévi-Straussian structuralism explores a radically different way of thinking about culture: as a system of signs. In another sense, chapters 1 and 2 form a pair. For Lévi-Strauss's focus on structure on the one hand, and the very different notion of structure deployed by the structural-functionalists (see chapter 1), taken together map some of the key tensions and conceptual possibilities of mid-20th-century British and French anthropology.

Chapters 3 to 8 present a series of critical reactions to, and departures from, the mid-20th-century anthropological focus on structure in its various forms. Chapter 3 focuses on the way Marx's writing was rediscovered as a source of critical insight by a generation of anthropologists in the 1970s. Chapter 4 traces two theoretical paradigms that, at different moments and with different conceptual tools and implications, sought to recapture the importance of individual agency: transactionalism and practice theory. Chapter 5 examines diverse anthropological approaches to the problem of history (famously backgrounded in anthropological accounts that took 'structure' as their main reference point), and spans a very extended period, from the immediate critics of structural functionalism in the 1950s, through to re-theorisations of the notion of the 'event' in the late 20th century. Whilst chapter 5 examines time, chapter 6, by contrast, focuses on place and on two key attempts to rethink the problem of ethnographic location in anthropology beyond the classic single-sited method. Chapter 6 also stretches across the second half of the 20th century, but instead of tracing a long development, it focuses on two points at the beginning and end of that period: the Manchester School's method of 'extended-case' study, and the reinvention of 'multi-sited fieldwork' in the 1990s. Chapter 7 explores a relatively recent turn to the study of cognition in anthropology, which self-consciously tries to reverse Durkheim's original decision to split sociological from psychological and biological questions, and seeks to challenge the enduring distaste of sociocultural anthropologists for psychological and experimental explanations of human behaviour.

Chapter 8 takes up a theme often seen as neglected in structural approaches: namely, the question of meaning. This was explored in American anthropologist Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology, through an eclectic recombination of Boasian cultural anthropology with Weberian hermeneutics. Chapter 8 opens a new cycle, focusing on meaning, knowledge and power, in which the general theme of 'departures from structure' takes a more specifically 'post-structuralist' turn. Indeed, the second half of chapter 8 focuses on the 'Writing-Culture' critique, that drew Geertzian hermeneutics back onto the question of anthropological writing itself.

Chapter 9 traces some of the ways in which postmodernist concerns with fragmentariness in anthropology were pre-empted and exceeded by the 'Frankfurt School' writings of Adorno and Benjamin, in which Marxist analytics were transmogrified in disruptive and thought-provoking ways. Chapter 10 gives an overview of the many-stranded work of Michel Foucault at the intersection of questions of knowledge, power and ethics, and evokes its multiple anthropological legacies. Chapter 11 focuses on the shift from studies of the body to a phenomenologically inflected concern with 'embodiment', taking the reader through both the innovatory and problematic aspects of this. Chapter 12 traces the complex epistemic and political relationship between anthropology and feminism, from early structuralist-inspired work on the anthropology of women, through to vibrant contemporary debates around gender, power and difference.

Chapters 13 and 14 focus on two recent conceptual developments (actor–network theory in chapter 13 and the ontological turn in chapter 14) that share – as we saw above – a certain commitment to not being classified as theories in the usual sense. The volume closes with a retrospective account (chapter 15) of theoretical discussions surrounding the notion of personhood. These discussions spanned the entire historical period of the volume. This final chapter thus doubles up as a broader consideration of the changing ways in which anthropological concepts have operated and continue to operate. While chapters 13 to 15 certainly continue the themes of power, knowledge and meaning that run through the previous cycle, they also form a cycle of their own around the question of what might be gained, and what lost, by imagining that one has arrived at a point that is 'after theory'.

What's anthropology got to do with it?

In closing this introduction, let me turn to the third and final problem I evoked earlier: What is anthropological about anthropological theory? After all, much of what is written under the previous two headings applies to theory in the social sciences and humanities more generally. What, then, does it mean to focus specifically on *anthropological* theory? What, if anything, is that object? This question is particularly pertinent as many of the key themes and contrasts recur throughout the pages of this book – the question of the agentive freedom of the individual in relation to broader forces and structures – the problem of how to think about change and stability in the same framework; the question of what constitutes adequate explanation, translation, description or interpretation – are general problems for scholars in the social sciences and the humanities. In engaging these problems, anthropologists also engage in a much broader interdisciplinary conversation.

Thus, a number of the theorists encountered in this book (such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Adorno, Foucault, Bourdieu, Butler or Latour) are primarily, or in some cases, exclusively, remembered as sociologists or philosophers, rather than as anthropologists. Conversely, some anthropological theories began within the discipline and then radiated out into the humanities and social sciences – Lévi-Strauss's structuralism (see chapter 2) and Geertz's interpretivism (see chapter 8) are two commonly invoked examples. But Lévi-Strauss built his thinking in close conversation with the structural linguistics of Roman Jakobson, and Geertz arguably drew from literary theorists as much as he gave in turn to historians and others. Finally, a number of the theoretical schools and fields examined in this book – such as gender studies or actor–network theory – are explicitly and self-consciously invested in breaking down disciplinary boundaries.

'Anthropological theory', therefore, is no more self-evident as an object, than is 'theory' in general, or particular 'theories'. Cutting it out from the broader interdisciplinary conversation in which it is embedded is a particular decision. This decision can be justified, much as the invocation of paradigms was above, as a heuristic one: to focus on anthropological theory is not to ignore those broader interdisciplinary conversations, but precisely to provide a frame against which questions about those broader contexts can be posed clearly.

But one might suggest a more ambitious justification: namely, that there is, after all, something distinctive about theory as viewed from anthropology, something we have already encountered above. What is distinctive is less the content, or even the labels of the theories invoked, and more the way in which theory in general fits into the economy of the discipline; namely, in perpetual complementary tension with fieldwork.

Concretely, this means two things. First, that discussions of theory in anthropology are usually intimately interwoven with close, detailed accounts of particular cases. Case studies and examples recur throughout these chapters, but as Englund (chapter 6) points out, following Max Gluckman, ethnography can be more than mere 'illustration'. Working and thinking through cases transforms the very nature and substance of anthropological theory, keeps it grounded, thick and contextual in a way that is quite characteristic of the discipline. Second, the ethnography–theory pairing in anthropology leads to the particular dynamic I described above, in which unfamiliar realities and experiences are constantly drawn upon to reorient and distort theoretical frameworks and assumptions. Anthropology has often had an irreverent and refreshing way with theory.

Of course, what is at stake in these claims is the question of the broader distinctiveness of anthropology as a discipline – a question that I do not have the space to explore in more detail here. However, one of the ways in which this book can be read is precisely as a collective and historically minded answer to this question. This book is in part an account of how the distinctiveness of anthropology was built, not only at a particular historical moment, as anthropology emerged from a broader interdisciplinary field, but also throughout the history of the discipline, as theoretical borrowings from, and loans to, other disciplines nevertheless produced a distinctively anthropological conversation about theory. It is this conversation to which the present book provides an introduction.

Notes

1 They include, most proximally, Yael Navaro, who lectured on the series but was unfortunately unable to contribute to the book, and the other members of the department involved in discussions of teaching and lecture planning in 2016: Uradyn Bulag, Hildegard Diemberger, Paola Filippuci, Sian Lazar, Perveez Mody and Joel Robbins. More distantly, this includes all of the past lecturers on this course over the decades – too many to name – whose thinking and teaching fed into the collective and enduring conversation described here.

2 Particularly in regional or more thematically oriented scholarship, anthropological work does often follow a more cumulative pattern. But the fact that higher status often attaches to those 'generalist' revolutionary claims than to more cumulative regional ones, underscores my point.

3 This is hardly surprising. Kuhn was himself inspired by a longstanding conversation between anthropology, sociology and history on cultural relativism and the social construction of knowledge. The 'paradigms' of historians of science and the 'cultures' of anthropologists are sister concepts.

4 This relates to an insightful observation by sociologist Andrew Abbott: theory in the social sciences tends to have a fractal structure; distinctions on higher scales replicate on lower ones (Abbott 2001). The distinction between positivist and interpretivist approaches in anthropology (see chapters 1 and 8 in this book) is sometimes described as a distinction between whole schools (for instance, symbolic anthropology being marked as interpretivist, functionalist anthropology marked as positivist). But, on another scale, the distinction replicates within functionalism itself: some functionalist anthropologists (such as Malinowski) were more interested in interpretive questions surrounding 'the native's point of view' while others (structural-functionalists) focused on the positivist question of the maintenance of social structure. And again, within 'structural-functionalism' itself, there are those works in which questions of perspective and interpretation make a showing (such as in the early chapters of Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer*) and those in which positivism ruled supreme.

5 And indeed, the odd extreme play with chronology can itself lead to interesting conceptual reflections and unexpected connections. For instance, for a few years, I taught structural-functionalism late in the series and just before actor-network theory, as a mini-series on 'social and anti-social anthropologies'. Readers might note a few resulting correspondences between chapters 1 and 13.

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