

Geertz Video Clip

8:18 minutes

<http://www.thirteen.org/bigideas/geertz.html>

touch on:

- wink vs. blink
- non-scientific approach: Boas anti-theoretical, but always believed that anthropology eventually could become a science once enough cross-cultural data was collected. Geertz simply denied this, put anthropology closer to literature, philosophy, history
- interpretation rather than explanation (meaning rather than causality):
 - “In short, in the G formulation, the question to ask about cultural phenomena is not what they do, but what they mean” (NYT obit)
 - compare with people like structural-functionalists (might not even be rational, as E-P would assert—he talks of “playing with fire,” a “status bloodbath”;
 - materialists like Steward and Harris
- VERY EMIC
(That is why he begins with anecdote—makes you confident that he was there, that he has insight on what Balinese think—he has gained their trust)
- ideographic—accused of being “enemy of the universal” (universal often associated with biological determinism, or other underlying forces that shape all of humanity)

Critiques:

- a) a-theoretical (seen as a continuation of Boasian thread)
- b) exoticizing: his own words, anthropologists are “merchants of astonishment”
- c) nihilism (“metatwaddle of a fashionable relativism”): cultural relativism, or the idea that every culture’s practices, from child sacrifice to clitoridectomy to mutilation of thieves must get equal respect → postmodernism

"nihilism

n -S

[G *nihilismus*, fr. L *nihil* nothing + G *-ismus* -ism]

1 a : a viewpoint that all traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that all existence is consequently senseless and useless : a denial of intrinsic meaning and value in life

b : a doctrine that denies or is taken as denying any objective or real ground of truth

specif : an ethical doctrine that denies any objective ground of moral principles --- called also *ethical nihilism*, *moral nihilism*

2 a : a doctrine that no reality exists

b : a profession of nihilistic delusions

3 : an annihilation (as by mystical contemplation) of desires and self-consciousness

4 a[Russ *nigilizm*, fr. F *nihilisme*, fr. G *nihilismus*]

(1) : a doctrine or belief that conditions in the social organization are so bad as to make destruction desirable for its own sake independent of any constructive program or possibility

(2)*usu cap* : the program or doctrine of a Russian party or succession of parties of the 19th and 20th centuries who proposed various schemes of revolutionary reform and resorted to terrorism and assassination

b : revolutionary propaganda : [TERRORISM](#)

5 : scepticism as to the therapeutic value of a drug or method

»therapeutic *nihilism* «

6 : the advocacy or practice of nihilism

7 : a nihilistic belief, act, or utterance

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