



19./ 20. March 2010:

Module 'State' in Luzern organised by Prof. Jürg Helbling, Universität Luzern with James C. Scott, Yale University

The work of James C. Scott has become an important corpus and a major point of reference in political anthropology in late 20th century. In 'Weapons of the Weak' (1985) and 'Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts' (1990) he proposed a novel approach to relations of power and social movements. In 'Seeing like a State' (1998) he examined the schemes of authoritarian high modern statecraft and their failure. In the course of his research in Southeast Asia and elsewhere James Scott has acquired an impressively subtle understanding of the operation of social forces on both micro and macro levels. James Scott will present his latest research and comment on contributions of the fellows relating to questions of the state.

21./22. May 2010:

Module 'Circulations' in La Sage VS, organised by Prof. Christian Ghasarian, Prof. Marion Fresia and Prof. Janine Dahinden, Neuchâtel, with Allan Hanson and George Marcus.

This module will reflect on the circulation of ideas, persons and items in our contemporary world. Circulations of different kinds, fostered by the current transnationalisation of social realities, technological means and communication, affect social actors at various levels of their personal and professional life. Institutions, representations and social practices are influenced by models, which are often defined as "global", although they can have a localized origin. Obvious economical forces drive the circulation of ideas, persons and items. But these forces can also be political, cultural or religious. In all cases, any transfer or circulation involves processes of re-appropriation and selective choices. Power relations, made of negotiations, adjustments, adoptions, or reinterpretations, and strategies of resistance are involved in the representations, discourses and practices of people engaged in these processes. "Global" models, whatever their origin, are therefore always articulated to local and regional, social and cultural dynamics and contribute to constantly redefine plural and syncretic societies. This module will reflect on this notion of "circulation" and the various theoretical and methodological approaches that have been developed to study its underlying dynamics. Participants will explore to what extent these dynamics are based on reciprocal influences but also dominant models which are more hegemonic. What are the continuities, innovations and syncretism these circulation involve in the representations and practices of social actors? Is the notion of power always relevant to the analysis of the circulations, and if so, how? Research papers will explore these questions, highlighting the diversity of scale of observations (macro, meso and micro) the study of our contemporary world can offer, and the theoretical; methodological and epistemological challenges involved in the study of complex circulatory phenomenon. The module will last two days and will be facilitated by Professors from the Institute of Ethnology and the Maison d'analyse des processus sociaux, as well as two foreign invited experts. PhD students will present one aspect of their research, which is linked to the general theme of circulation, drawing on a concrete case study as well as on larger theoretical reflexions.

Venue : Hôtel de la Sage, La Sage, canton de Valais.

Invited experts: Allan Hanson (University of Kansas), George Marcus (University of California).

Professors responsible of the workshop: Christian Ghasarian (Institut d'ethnologie); Marion Fresia (Institut d'ethnologie); Janine Dahinden (Maison d'analyse des processus sociaux)

8./9. June 2010:

Module 'Responsibility' in Bern, organised by Prof. Julia Eckert, Universität Bern with Nandini Sundar and John Comaroff.

The attribution of responsibility is a key operation in any social organisation. Conceptualisations of responsibility tell us about specific distinctions between duty, guilt, fate or chance. They relate to knowledge systems of causality and culpability, and inform notions of justice and injustice. Responsibility and liability are central to any concept of law, and we find particular and widely varying notions of responsibility and liability in all legal orders. They differ in their theories of causality, their norms of obligation and their ideas of morality, and they differ in how they relate causal responsibility, responsibility in terms of duties and obligations and moral responsibility to each other. They differ in their attribution of strict liability and the factors which are taken into account as extenuating circumstances. They are particular as to the rules by which individuals or collectives are attributed responsibility, and the ways in which individual and corporate responsibility relate to each other. In a more general anthropological sense, differing notions of liability express different forms of social organisation. Conceptualisations of responsibility thus exemplify the relation of social organisation and law. They touch on the issues of the place of the individual within secondary groups and within society; on understandings of the world and oneself within it; of the different boundaries drawn between social groups pertaining to different issues. Responsibility has a temporal dimension, expressing notions of how generations are connected; of when time lapses; and under which conditions of exception rules of liability do not apply. Responsibility delineates the world in how far it incorporates nature into its scope. Thus, explorations of responsibility tell us about the construction of specific social relations and their relation to the social and cosmological order. We can currently observe fundamental changes in constructions of liability. Particularly, current processes of the transnationalisation of legal concepts, of religious norms of responsibility, of scientific understanding of the biological basis of human behaviour, and changes in the organisation of governance are of interest in this regard. We witness changing notions of the person, of communities and relations of obligation, of temporal connectedness. We observe plural religiously founded notions of liability and ideals of responsibility and the ways such religious notions of liability and responsibility are transformed in their interaction with other notions of responsibility. We are dealing with the reorganisation of governance both in terms of the new delineation of tasks and novel constellation of actors, and the fragmentation of responsibility and liability that may ensue. In question is thus the global political economy of narratives of causality, of culpability, of risk, fate, karma, justice and injustice.

9./10.Sept. 2010:

Module 'Skills' in Zürich, organised by Prof. Mareile Flitsch, Völkerkunde Museum Zürich, with Tim Ingold and Trevor Marchand.

Issues like practical knowledge and skill have in recent years re-emerged as a field for anthropologists who see the separation of the social and the technical in social sciences as problematic. Such a separation too often implies a neglect of the embeddedness of practical knowledge into social life and may lead to a rather superficial understanding of crucial everyday concerns of the people we study.

In focussing on the topic of skill, in particular of the characteristics of skill in crafts, this module proposes to

reconsider the way in which people organize, embody and transmit their practical knowledge, the processes through which they develop skilled practice. We will discuss the communication, interpretation and acquisition of skilled practices, as well as the consequences of a deteriorating skill set (de-skilling) due to socio-technical or economic change, as well as to alienation, ageing and physical impairment.

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